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D'ei Chochmah L'nafshechah

“Let your soul know wisdom”

Rosh Hashanah

From the discourses of Moreinu v'Rabeinu
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Likutei Moharan I:211—Traveling to the Tzaddik

“The practice of chassidim traveling to *tzaddikim* for Rosh Hashanah is rooted in the fact that the main mitigation of heavenly judgments is only through the sanctification and purification of one’s thoughts, because this is their source. As we find in the *Zohar*: ‘Everything is clarified through thought.’ And one can only come to have a pure mind through binding oneself to the *tzaddikim*, as we find in the *Zohar*: ‘And Moshe took the bones of Yosef...’ Moshe is the aspect of the mind, Yosef is the aspect of the *tzaddik*, and there is no completion of the mind without binding oneself to the *tzaddikim*. Rosh Hashanah is the root of judgments for the entire year, and one must purify his thoughts in order to mitigate them. This is the reason for traveling to the *tzaddikim*—to merit to sanctify one’s thoughts.”¹

“The main mitigation of heavenly judgments is only through the sanctification and purification of one’s thoughts...” All of the harsh judgments that pass over a person are the results of his sins. And even if he did not sin at the time, nevertheless it is possible that he is being judged for sins that he did long before, as the *Sefer Tanya* explains. Rebbe Nachman taught in *Likutei Moharan I:35* that all negative character traits are the roots of a person’s sins, as we find in the *Sha’arei Kedushah* of Rav Chaim Vital, and all of them derive from the lack of holiness of his thoughts. This is the inner meaning of, “Gavriel descended and struck a reed into the sea upon which the great city of Rome amassed and evolved.” When one interposes foreign philosophies

¹ *Likutei Moharan I:211*

into the sea of one's wisdom, the primordial serpent and all negative traits gain a foothold.

And, of course, the inverse is no less true. If a person purifies his mind he leaves all of his sins behind and all of the judgments that he was under are mitigated. This is the meaning of the statement in the *Zohar* that everything is clarified through thought—all heavenly judgments are sweetened through thought. When a person purifies his thoughts completely, no harsh judgment can hold sway over him because he has already been transformed into goodness and in so doing he has rectified all of his sins. Even though he has already transgressed any number of sins, and even though every sin generates an accusing angel that can only be nullified by the sinner purifying his thoughts completely, true rectification is still possible. As the sages taught, once it is clear that the person could go through the exact same challenge and not fall into the same sin he has repented completely. Once a person has purified the root of the problem, it is completely repaired. It is just as Rebbe Nachman taught, that purification of the mind is the main element of *teshuvah* which is symbolized by the notation called *zarka*. [The *zarka* is above the line and is a twisted curvature, flung back upon itself. It means “thrown,” and Rebbe Nachman explains that *teshuvah* throws the person back to the place where he was before the sin.]

“And one can only come to have a pure mind...”—One must know that all of the souls of each generation are parts of an organic whole and every single one is greater than its fellow since there are no two people who are on the exact same level at any given time.² Hashem's light flows down from level to level, from the greater soul to the lesser soul, just as the Arizal explained regarding the ordering of the spiritual worlds from above to below. The Baal HaTanya teaches that the worlds parallel the ordering of souls, and so it is clear that as long as people are not bound to the *tzaddik*, their *mochin* are lacking—Hashem's light is in some way not shining on them as it should since its channel of descent is broken, and their *Chochmah*, *Binah*, and *Da'as* are not

² *Likutei Moharan* I:25

apprehending G-dliness fully. Yet when people come to the *tzaddik* who has already merited to receive Hashem's light, they receive the full measure of holy awareness that is possible for them, and they are able to purify their thoughts so that they will be able from then on to focus exclusively on G-dliness and Hashem's Torah.

“Rosh Hashanah is the root of judgments for the entire year...”—Rosh Hashanah is the beginning of the entire year, the “head” of the year, and so everything that is decreed upon a person is fixed then. Both Rebbe Nachman and the Maggid of Mezeritch explained that it is the person's thoughts during Rosh Hashanah themselves that constitute the “writing” of the person's destiny from above. The three books that are open during Rosh Hashanah are actually the thoughts of the person, and if a person purifies his mind at that time it is certain that his Divine service will come more easily throughout the coming year and all of the judgments on him will be mitigated. The Maggid taught that if a person finds himself caught up in negative thoughts, he should meditate on the 72-Name which is associated with Divine mercy [אסח = 72] and visualize giving his life to sanctify Hashem's Name—this will mitigate all the judgments on him.³ Rebbe Nachman said instead that one should think good and holy thoughts and this itself can effect the mitigation of judgments.

“This is the reason for traveling to the *tzaddikim*...”—We therefore travel to the *tzaddikim* for Rosh Hashanah, so that it will be easier for us to think only good thoughts: of love and fear of Hashem, of *dveikus* and self-nullification before Hashem. And even if, G-d forbid, a stray negative thought enters a person's head on Rosh Hashanah, he will not panic but instead mitigate it through the paths we have already mentioned. He will sweeten it with thoughts of *mesirus nefesh* or the Divine Names, or even simply by fighting it off and replacing it with a better thought. One is empowered to do this by having received an additional measure of holy awareness, which is Hashem's light that descends upon the person who makes the journey to the *tzaddik*. And it is this that makes a person worthy of having a good and blessed coming year.

³ *Maggid D'varav l'Yaakov*

Now, to explain the matter at a deeper level: All judgments are the product of the shattering of the primordial vessels, when *Ze'ir Anpin* and *Nukvah* within the world of *Atzilus* fell down into the lower worlds of *Beriyah-Yetzirah-Asiyah*. Their main rectification is achieved by rising again from the worlds of *BY"A* which are [relatively speaking] like death, to the level of *Atzilus* which is the world of *Chochmah* and life. As the verse says, “Wisdom gives life to those who possess it.”⁴ The Arizal explains that when one receives the light of *Chochmah*, all judgments are sweetened. The Rashash teaches that this is the main rectification that is attained through *Chochmah* within the world of *Adam Kadmon*, and this is the main life-force that permeates the world of *Atzilus*.⁵

In relation to other Jewish souls of the generation, the *tzaddikim* are like *Atzilus* and the rest are like the lower worlds of *BY"A*.⁶ This is why most people struggle terribly with their negative thoughts, because the worlds of *BY"A* are the place of *shevirah* and the foothold of all negative traits and all challenges to the sanctity of the mind. This is in stark contrast to the *tzaddik* who is at the level of *Atzilus*—his mind is already pure and he is in a state of true spiritual vitality. This purity is expressed by the Divine Name *היטטפטי*, which the Ohev Yisrael explained implies the holiness of the mind. The *י"ט* [child, and also implies that which drips down] represents *Ze'ir Anpin* and *Nukvah* within the world of *Atzilus* which are called the “children” of *Abba / Chochmah* and *Imma / Binah*. The two “children” [*י"ט י"ט*] rise up to the place of *י"י* which parallel *Abba* and *Imma* of *Atzilus*. They are restored from the lower world of *BY"A* to the higher world of *Atzilus* that is their source, and all of the judgments are mitigated. This is why it is natural that when ordinary people—*beinonim* who are the aspect of *BY"A*—travel to the *tzaddik* who is the aspect of *Atzilus*, the levels of *Ze'ir Anpin* and *Nukvah* that had been caught in *BY"A* are returned to their origin in the world of *Atzilus*.

⁴ *Koheles* 7:12

⁵ *B'Rechovos HaNahar* 9b

⁶ We find this concept in the writings of the Baal HaTanya in many places.

“As we find in the Zohar: ‘And Moshe took the bones of Yosef...’”—Here Rebbe Nachman is alluding to a very deep concept. The Ramchal teaches that even though the Arizal revealed all of the *yichudim* of the world of *Atzilus* to us, nevertheless this is not the main thing that will spark the redemption. The main way in which the redemption will come is when the lower worlds of *Beriyah-Yetzirah-Asiyah* rise up to the world of *Atzilus* themselves and become the aspect of *Nukvah* which is *Malchus*. It is only through this profound *yichud* that the redemption will come fully and finally. And so when one meditates on the Arizal’s *yichudim* for the world of *Atzilus*, it is important to join them to the worlds of *BY”A* so that the rectification can be accomplished completely.

Now we can have a glimmer of understanding why it is that the *tzaddik* who is the aspect of *Atzilus* is not really complete unless the people who are the aspect of the lower worlds of *BY”A* come to him and join together with him. This is why Rebbe Nachman says here in this lesson, “There is no completion of the mind [*mochin*] without binding oneself to the *tzaddikim*.” He is hinting that the *mochin* themselves at the level of *Atzilus* are incomplete unless the levels of *BY”A* join with them.

This is the meaning of Moshe taking the bones of Yosef with him. Moshe Rabbeinu is the level of *Atzilus*, and he takes the bones of Yosef who is *Yesod*, the progeny of *Yaakov* and *Rachel* who descend to the worlds of *BY”A*. But when they join together, there is completion and the *yichud* is revealed.

The lesson implies that not only do the *beinonim* have to do the work of binding themselves to the *tzaddik*; the *tzaddik* also has to do the *avodah* of binding himself to the people who come to him. It was to this end that Rebbe Nachman wrote: “Rosh Hashanah is the root of judgments for the entire year...” The Arizal taught that the *nesirah* [shearing off of the back-to-back state of *Nukvah* and *Ze’ir Anpin*] which takes place on Rosh Hashanah encapsulates the *nesirah* of the entire year.⁷ This is why we only say, “Remember us...” on Rosh Hashanah, because the main aspect of *nesirah*

⁷ *Sha’ar Hakavanos, Sha’ar HaAmidah, Drush #2*

takes place on Rosh Hashanah. The Rashash explained further that Rosh Hashanah is the “head” and *mochin* of *CHaBaD* of the entire year, and the *nesirah* is the drawing of all of the judgments to *Nukvah* [*Malchus-Shechinah-Knesses Yisrael*], which is the repository of all of the souls of the Jewish people. Anyone, then, who purifies his mind at this time and uplifts all judgments to their source—either by actually traveling to the *tzaddik* and uplifting *Ze'ir Anpin* and *Nukvah* to *Atzilus*, or in his mind by conquering his negative thoughts—is certainly freed from judgments throughout the year to come and will merit a good and blessed year, and be written in the book of true *tzaddikim*.



Sichos HaRan #47—On Hisbodedus

“It requires great merit to be worthy of meditating for an hour every day and to feel regret for things over which one ought to feel regret. For not everyone merits to compose his mind for a set time every day, because the day passes one by and one finds that he didn’t have the time to really sit down and think even once in his whole life. Therefore, one must make strenuous effort and see to it that he designates for himself the time to really focus on all of his deeds that he does in the world, if it really befits him to waste his life on such actions. But because a person does not compose his thoughts and has no real awareness—and even if he does has a flash of mental composure occasionally—his awareness does not have staying power. It immediately drifts away from him, and even the little that he has is weak because he hasn’t really understood the foolish nature of this world.

“However, if a person would have a composed and strongly focused mind, he would understand that all is foolishness and vanity, especially the desire that some people have for fame and power and to travel throughout the country—all is

vanity and striving after the wind, and is in truth complete foolishness. The truth is that such pursuits do not even provide real pleasure or satisfaction in this world, because it is full of suffering and humiliation.

“One of the Rebbe’s followers once had a strong desire for renown. He said to him: ‘You cannot even recite *birkas hamazon* sincerely, because you always need to make sure that your actions are pleasing to other people. You never perform even the simplest form of *avodah* for the sake of heaven!’”⁸

The main form of *hisbodedus* is to designate time within the *nefesh*, and anyone who begins at this level will, as a matter of course, come to the level of an actual hour of time. Yet the first goal is to make an hour within the soul; one must do all he can to compose his mind every day for some period of time. When one really enters into this *avodah*, the “hour” will become a literal hour or more.

A person must compose his mind every day, for at least a moment, to consider what is happening to him in the world. This is the foundation of all of Rebbe Nachman’s works—the fundamental *avodah* of *hisbodedus* and focusing one’s mind [on the *tachlis*]. One must consider his purpose in life. And even if everyone knows this and everyone has heard of this, and there are even people who do this a little bit, nevertheless one must really understand clearly and practically the inner point of this *avodah*.

When there is a circle that surrounds a point, every part of the circle is driven by its relationship to the central point. And so every person must have this point absolutely clear in his mind so that the circle should surround the point clearly and strongly.

Composing the mind means thinking about Hashem and one’s purpose and duty in the world. There are many lessons in *Likutei Moharan* about this—like lesson #52 which is called, “He who is awake at night” and others—and we need to understand the matter more deeply. The fact is that most people in the world do speak a few words to

⁸ *Sichos HaRan* #47

Hashem every day, and so what is the innovation in Rebbe Nachman's approach? Did he innovate that one must watch the clock and fill a full hour with prayers? And even though it is certainly important to maximize the time one spends in prayer, this does not fulfill the requirement of being time spent "composing one's mind" and joining with Hashem. We need to understand more deeply how *hisbodedus* affects the soul of the person. Rebbe Nachman said that the face of a person who spends time in *hisbodedus* shines with a completely different light. And even if a person doesn't focus on the depth of the matter but only approaches *hisbodedus* in a simple way, he is still certainly in the realm of *hisbodedus*. In every form of *avodah* there are countless levels. With *hisbodedus* as well, there is the *Netzach-Hod-Yesod* aspect, which is just carrying out the practice simply. There is the level of *CHaGaT* as well as that of *CHaBaD*. And even though the main thing is actually carrying out the practice, nevertheless one should build up his *hisbodedus* so that it is fully-formed, complete in all its levels, as much as possible. Just as regular prayer has its simple level of enunciating the words, and then there is the further level of intention and also emotional arousal, so too is it with *hisbodedus*. Spontaneous prayer and meditation is a new and deep level that is bound up with the nature and purpose of Moshiach, for the redemption of the body and soul collectively and individually depend on *hisbodedus*.

Every single person can, and must, merit redemption—to be freed completely from the *yetzer hara*. The *tzaddikim* have taught us that it is possible to escape the clutches of the *yetzer* and merit *tikkun habris* and constant joy. The *bris* is equivalent to the sum תרי"ג when the *kollel* is added [ברית = 612]—it includes the entire Torah. The real *avodah* of *tikkun habris* is when a person works to cut away the *orlah*, to pull aside the *nogah* [to reveal the corona], and suction the blood. The cutting draws down the *mochin* of *Binah* to the child; the revealing of the corona draws down *Chochmah*, and the suction draws the *mochin* of *Kesser* to the child. This is why there are three main figures surrounding the child: the *mohel* embodying *Binah*; the father embodying

Chochmah; and the *sandak* embodying *Kesser*. The process of circumcision applies to everyone all the time: “And you shall circumcise the foreskin of your hearts.”⁹

How, then, is one to shear away the negative? It seems as though most people trying to serve Hashem really have no idea how to “cut away” the negative. The only real way to do it is by seeking *dveikus*. “Turn aside from evil”—don’t focus on it—“And do good”—focus your mind instead on the good, on *dveikus*. So the first thing is to do good. The problem is that when a person throws himself into *avodas Hashem* and *dveikus* he finds that even if he has a good start, eventually he is beset by challenges and he falls in certain ways. But this is the way in *avodah*—that there are endless ups and downs. We see this in Rebbe Nachman’s story of the Lost Princess: on the days that the viceroy very nearly released her from her imprisonment, he fell by eating first and then by drinking the wine and falling asleep. He only found her in the end after many, many years of searching. The main difference between his “almost” and his eventual success was that the success took place after searching for years with great persistence.

This itself contains a deep idea. When a person enters into *avodas Hashem* there are two aspects: *Chochmah* and *Binah*. Even though we know that the main focus of *avodah* at the beginning is *Binah* [struggle and *teshuvah*, and a great deal of yearning] and only afterward the illumination of *Chochmah*, nevertheless the Kabbalistic works teach that the real beginning is from *Chochmah* even though the person sinned and caused spiritual damage.¹⁰ First he must occupy himself with good and avoid focusing on evil—this is the nature of *Chochmah*, not to focus on his own state but just to forget everything, forge ahead, and do good. He must forget the past entirely and only seek to advance in his *avodah*. All the while that self-examination will confuse him he must ignore it and only work on moving forward, filled with faith that Hashem is doing everything for his good.

This is at the beginning. But in the end there will be ups and downs because of the negativity that still clings to him—it is as though he has immersed with an impure

⁹ *Devarim* 10:16

¹⁰ This is discussed in the works that address the deeper meaning of *Sefiras Ha'Omer*.

animal grasped in his hand—and he must still go back and cut away the negative. How does he do this? The very fact that he spends time thinking about how much he wants to change, to improve his Torah study and prayer and open a new chapter in his life, the fact that he seeks a path to change practically, all of this is the *mochin* of *Binah* [which cuts away the foreskin]. This is what it means to expend effort on *hisbonenus* or contemplation. *Binah* is like a *mikveh* that purifies the person from all his impurities, it cleanses him from all of his bad habits. This itself is *milah* which purifies his sins.

After a person has spent part of his day in the *Chochmah*-state of doing good and ignoring the negative, he still must spend afterward some part of his day in the work of *Binah*—examining himself to find what requires improvement, and to consider how to achieve what he knows that he must change for the better. Did I learn enough? Perhaps I should add another *shiur* to my schedule? How can I pray with more concentration? Every person has to contemplate the areas he needs to change in any number of ways, each person in according with his nature and needs. This contemplation is a very great *avodah*.

The Ramchal wrote that no *tzaddik* ever merited to understand his true meaning except by spending a great deal of time every day asking himself the question, “How am I different from Avraham Avinu and the other great *tzaddikim*, who found favor in the eyes of Hashem while I have not?” How am I to improve? This is the *avodah* of cutting away the *orlah*, to excise the negative from oneself.

One should never be thrown into confusion by thinking that he has to overturn his entire life overnight. The fact that he is engaged in this kind of contemplation it itself the *avodah*. He should not ask himself, “I already have prayed about this yesterday and I still haven't changed. What have I accomplished?” The fact that one seeks, that he does not allow a day to go by completely wasted, his contemplation awakens the world of *Binah* and it begins to cut away the evil from his soul. Even if he doesn't yet see any observable change, more and more of the negative is being sheared away until he is ultimately purified.

Afterward, he must abandon himself to Hashem's providence, that everything is for his good, and return to the world of *Chochmah*. After his time in *hisbonenus*, he merits a much more genuine level of *bitul* later on, which is the light of *Chochmah*. Before his time in contemplation, his level of *bitul* was much smaller, but after having cut away the evil from his soul he merits a light of *Chochmah* and *bitul* that is much greater.

This is the meaning of פריעה, the exposure of the corona. It is the פורע י"ה, it is the revelation of G-dliness at a very high level. The first experience of *Chochmah* was just a free gift and an outpouring of Hashem's kindness. And even though this is very great, nevertheless its absolute level is small because it preceded the period of contemplation. And one must do this *avodah* every day. One must consider, even for a few minutes, what his purpose in life is and he must speak to Hashem. "What will be with me? How can I change myself? How can I pray better?" And he must really think about what he needs to do to change. Even if he does not see change right away, he must know that the work of *Binah* itself atones for his sins and rectifies his soul. Afterward he must focus on *bitul*, and this is really a much harder and higher form of *bitul*, because self-examination always makes a person want to see change. He needs to nullify himself [and his expectations] to Hashem's will—he must reveal more G-dliness and be פורע י"ה. Even if it appears as though nothing has changed, this is untrue. His *hisbonenus* and *teshuvah* have changed him inside, and everything afterwards is likewise transformed.

This is so even if he feels that in the realm of the physical he has even fallen lower. As Rabbi Abahu said, "And I said that I struggled for nothing..."¹¹ In truth, the higher levels of his soul—*neshamah* / *Binah* and *chayah* / *Chochmah*—have been altered and their influence reaches the inner nature of the *nefesh*.

After a great deal of time in this *avodah*, one merits the level of *Kesser*, because *Kesser* means waiting.¹² By having faith in the power of prayer and the patience to wait for a long time and abandon himself to Hashem's will, he will ultimately receive the

¹¹ *Yalkut Shimoni, Yeshayah* 49, #468

¹² *Likutei Moharan* I:6

light of Hashem's countenance. He will reach the level of the *teshuvah* of Shabbos, to change his ways in action and be a true *baal teshuvah*.

This *teshuvah* is the main *avodah* of Elul. One must not be discouraged by failing to see ready change or even by seeing its opposite. One must continue doing the work of cutting away the evil and exposing the light and life that is Hashem, and in the merit of this *avodah* we will experience the ultimate redemption. For the Jewish people will only be redeemed in the merit of *teshuvah*, and it is repentance that will allow us to forge a new *bris* with Hashem. With the arrival of our righteous redeemer in mercy, speedily and in our days. Amen.

Translated and Adapted by Rav Micha Golshevsky.