



קונטרס

# ב'י'ם ד'ר'כ'ך

B'YAM DARKECHA

**Shovavim • Kedusha**

Attaining Holiness

בס"ד



קונטרס  
ב'ים  
דרכך

דרכי עבודה למעשה

**B'yam Darkecha**

Shovavim • Kedusha

Attaining Holiness



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# Shovavim



# CHAPTER ONE



## What is “Bris”?

### 1: Shovavim: Days of Pleasure

The days of Shovavim are known as an auspicious time to work on *tikkun HaBris*.<sup>1</sup>

For many people, just hearing the words “*tikkun haBris*” brings feelings of heaviness, and these days can be seen as difficult days of fasting and *teshuvah*.

The root cause of this misconception is the mistaken

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1. The Hebrew word “Shovavim” (שובבים) is an acronym that stands for the words שמות, וארא, בא, בשלח, יתרו, משפטים. These 6 weeks, when we read the 6 Torah portions about the Egyptian slavery and the Jewish people’s subsequent redemption and receiving of the Torah, are known to be an auspicious time to work on attaining holiness and improving ourselves in areas of *tikkun / shmiras haBris* (rectifying and safeguarding the Bris / covenant). In this section, we will define what this Bris is, how to safeguard it, and how to correct ourselves if we did not uphold it.

The connection between *tikkun haBris* and Shovavim will be explained further in Chapter 5.

notion that working on the Bris only means that we need to separate from *taavos* (physical temptations). Trying to overcome *taavos* is hard and takes a lot of strength, and this is why there is a heaviness and difficulty associated with this entire topic.

But the truth is the exact opposite — this holy time is full of *ohr* (spiritual “light”<sup>2</sup>), when we can bask in the pleasure of closeness with Hashem. There is nothing in the world that is more pleasurable than our Bris with Hashem.

Our avodas Hashem and our relationship with Hashem bring a tremendous spiritual pleasure to our neshamah!<sup>3</sup>

The entire topic of *shmiras haBris* is not there to reduce the pleasure we can have in life. On the contrary, *shmiras haBris* gives us the only true pleasure you can get in the world — the genuine pleasure of a close relationship with our Creator.

Guarding our Bris distances us from the counterfeit pleasures of the yetzer hara, which start off as sweet and end in bitterness.

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2. Spiritual “light” is a holy influence from Hashem that enables a Yid to sense Hashem's presence.

3. As it says: *טַעֲמוּ וּרְאוּ כִּי טוֹב הוּא*, *Taste and see that Hashem is good* (Tehillim 34:9); *אָז תִּתְעַנֵּג עַל הוּא*, *Then you will take pleasure in Hashem* (Yeshayah 58:14); *שְׁמָעוּ שְׁמוּעָ אֵלַי וְאֶכְלוּ טוֹב וְתִתְעַנֵּג בְּדַשָּׁן נִפְתָּחִם*, *Listen to Me and you will eat well, and enjoy in the delight of your soul* (ibid. 55:2); *דְּרָכֶיהָ דְּרָכֵי נֵעִם*, *Its ways are ways of pleasantness* (Mishlei 3:17).

It is important for us to understand this topic properly, so that we can substitute any heaviness or negative associations with excitement and passion for this holy time of year!

Through the proper perspectives, we can gain the tools and determination to overcome the great spiritual challenges of our generation.

With Hashem's help, we will start from the beginning and build our way through this topic, one step at a time.

## 2: Bris

"Bris" means a covenant, or a strong commitment between two parties. The commitments they agree upon are determined when the covenant is formed.<sup>4</sup>

Since our Bris with Hashem originated with Avraham Avinu, let's take a look at what happened there, so we can understand better what this Bris is all about.

וְהִקְמֹתִי אֶת בְּרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ וּבֵין זֶרְעֶךָ אַחֲרָיָהּ לְדֹרֹתָם לְבְרִית עוֹלָם  
לְהָיוֹת לָךְ לְאֱלֹקִים וּלְזֶרְעֶךָ אַחֲרָיָהּ.

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4. A simple kind of Bris is a covenant that requires some commitment from each side. An example of this is the agreement that Lavan made with Yaakov Avinu, that each would not harm the other.

But sometimes, the technical agreement is not the end goal but rather is used as a way to strengthen a deeper relationship between the two sides. This is the type of Bris we have with Hashem — a technical agreement which is for the purpose of deepening our connection to Him.

*I will maintain My covenant between Me and you, and your offspring to come, as an everlasting covenant throughout the ages, to be a God to you and to your offspring after you (Bereishis 17:7).*

זֹאת בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמְרוּ בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין זֶרַעְךָ אַחֲרַיִךְ הַמּוֹל לָכֶם  
כָּל זָכָר. וְנִמְלַתֶם אֶת בָּשָׂר עֲרֻלְתְּכֶם וְהָיָה לְאוֹת בְּרִית בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם.

*This shall be the covenant which you will keep, between Me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and that shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you (ibid. vv. 10–11).*

There are two parts to this Bris. The first part is Hashem's side of the Bris. Hashem guarantees us that He will rest His holy Presence among us, and that we will be His beloved children, the nation of Hashem.

The second part is our side of the Bris, where the Jewish people commit to having a *bris milah*.

### 3: Removing the Klippos

The Zohar Hakadosh explains that the *orlah* (foreskin), is not just a piece of skin that needs to be removed during a *bris milah*. Rather, the *orlah* is a term for the klippos<sup>5</sup> and

5. This is why it is called a klippah, which means a shell or a peel, because the klippos conceal the truth in the same way that the peel covers a fruit.

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the *yetzer hara*, which represents anything that covers over and conceals the light of Hashem from us.

Our obligation to remove the physical *orlah* also obligates us to remove what the *orlah* represents on a deeper level. That is our lifelong mission – to rid ourselves of the klippos.

Our responsibility to uphold our side of the Bris is not just to remove the *orlah*, but also to remove anything that covers our *emunah* and damages our relationship with Hashem.<sup>6</sup>

Cutting off the klippos includes separating ourselves from sin and temptation.<sup>7</sup>

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6. The mitzvah of bris milah was given to Avraham Avinu, because he excelled in *emunah*. Avraham searched for what was hidden beneath the surface – under the peel – because he understood that there must be something there; there had to be a Creator of the world. Then the Creator revealed Himself, and Avraham merited to live with His presence.

Hashem's covenant was with Avraham and all his future descendants, to be the ones to whom Hashem reveals Himself, and to be the ones who reveal Hashem to the world.

7. Although the Bris requires us to separate from every type of sin, the primary work of guarding the Bris relates to sins that have *taavah* (temptation) and pleasure.

The pursuit of pleasure is the strongest attraction a person has in this world. Therefore, this is the tool the klippos use to pull people towards them, and that is why the main work is in these areas – because that is the main way

#### 4: Living with Hashem

It is important to remember that removing the klippos from ourselves is not the end goal, but rather that is the preparation for the ultimate goal, the true purpose of the Bris.

The true purpose of the Bris is, as Hashem assures us, that He will rest His Divine Presence among us, and we will merit to recognize His Oneness and live a life with the pleasure of love, faith, and attachment to Him.

This is what Hashem promised to Avraham when He made the Bris: *וְלֵאמֹר לְךָ יֵאלֶקִים וְלְאַחֲרָיֶךָ*, *To be for you a God and to your descendants after you* (Bereishis 17:7).

Hashem will be our God, and we will be His beloved children. By upholding the Bris, we can feel and experience a life of *emunah*, a life of truth, and a life of genuine pleasure.<sup>8</sup>

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the klippos try to draw us in.

8. There are three stages of a physical *bris milah*, which represent three deeper levels in our covenant with Hashem. The first is cutting the *orlah* (the circumcision itself). This represents removing the klippos from ourselves, which means to stay away from aveiros.

The second stage is called *pri'ah*, which involves removing the thin layer that covers the limb itself. *Pri'ah* represents the things we can do in this world that are not a mitzvah but are also not an aveirah. If we do these things with holiness and incorporate them into our avodas Hashem, they move to the side of *kedushah*; otherwise, they are seized by the klippos as well, God forbid. Our

## 5: Why We Need to Separate From Aveiros

In order for Hashem to reveal His presence to us in this way, He asks us to separate from the klippos. If we connect to the klippos, God forbid, we allow them to conceal Hashem from us, and then we do not feel His presence. But by disconnecting from the klippos, we remove the concealment and reveal Hashem.

The reason for this is as follows: The truth of reality is that Hashem is the only true existence in the world, and there is none other than Him (*Ein Od Milvado*). Hashem gives life and sustains everything in the world, and everything that happens is all only what He orchestrates.

But in order to balance the world with free will, Hashem created the klippos, which do exactly what they are called — they are always trying to cover over and conceal the existence of Hashem.

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job is to always use these things with holiness, to prevent the klippos from grasping onto them.

The third stage of the Bris is revealing what was under that thin layer, which is called the *atarah* (lit. “crown”). Revealing the *atarah* represents revealing the presence of Hashem with clarity, and living with Him in a tangible way.

By separating from aveiros (removing the *orlah*), and sanctifying the mundane (*pri'ah*), we can merit to reveal Hashem (reveal the *atarah*) and live a true life of the pleasure of closeness to Hashem. Only a life of *emunah* and attachment is an authentic life; someone who lives this way is truly living! As it says in the Torah (*Devarim* 4:4): וְאַתֶּם הַדְּבָקִים בְּהוֹיָה אֱלֹקֵיכֶם חַיִּים כְּלֶכֶם הַיּוֹם – You who cling to Hashem your God, you are living today.

Therefore, when a Yid is able to remove the klippos, he is removing a layer of the covering that conceals the truth of reality. The moment that happens, his neshamah will automatically experience the presence of Hashem with more clarity.

When the barriers are taken down, you can live with Hashem and naturally feel His presence in all areas of life. This leads us to live life the proper way – a life of emunah!

## 6: Emunah

Emunah is the foundation of all of avodas Hashem. Emunah means to recognize Hashem's Presence with clarity. As the Torah teaches us: וַיִּדְעַת הַיּוֹם וְהִשְׁבֵּת אֶל לִבָּהּ: *Know therefore this day and keep in mind that Hashem alone is God in heaven above and on earth below; there is no other* (Devarim 4:39). And it says: כָּל מִצְוֹתֶיךָ אֱמוּנָה: *All Your mitzvos are emunah* (Tehillim 119:86).<sup>9</sup>

The ultimate purpose of all avodas Hashem is to come

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9. *Emunah* is the “knowledge” of the neshamah. Living with *emunah* means that our neshamah knows the truth of *Ein Od Milvado* with such clarity that it guides us to live with this truth at all times. Because *emunah* is a characteristic of the neshamah, it is stronger and higher than intellectual knowledge, and it can overcome the limited intellect of our minds. This is why, throughout the generations, Jews have been able to give up their lives to sanctify Hashem's Name. *Emunah* is what our neshamah knows and feels, and it is what guides us, even though we often cannot explain or articulate it.



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to recognize Hashem's presence. Even if we fulfill all of Torah and mitzvos, if we do not live with the presence of Hashem in a tangible way, we will be missing a most crucial component of our avodas Hashem.

This is the covenant Hashem forged with us. If we separate ourselves from the klippas, we will be able to sense that He is our God and we are His beloved children, and we will merit to feel His presence and live a life of *emunah*.

## 7: Summary

In summary: An important and necessary component of guarding our Bris is that wherever we are tempted by a klippah, we uphold our covenant with our Creator, cut off the klippah, and separate ourselves from it.

However, the primary Bris is not just about avoiding the bad; it is about pursuing the good! When we uphold the Bris, Hashem reveals Himself to us and we can merit to experience what it means to live as His beloved people.

But the prerequisite for this is that we need to overcome our yetzer hara and disconnect from the false illusions of evil. Through this, we can merit to cling to Hashem and to feel the pleasure of a close relationship with Him.<sup>10</sup>

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10. The stronger the pull of the yetzer hara, the stronger the relationship with Hashem one will build if he can muster up the strength to overcome it. A Yid who is successful in separating from such klippas will merit incredible spiritual pleasure, and be able to truly "taste" and delight in his relationship

It is crucial to understand this point: “Bris” means to live with Hashem and to live a life of love and attachment to Him, and to make this our entire aspiration in life.

Then we will find it easier to overcome our yetzer hara and will even find satisfaction and enjoyment in the process. This is because our motivation is driven by a passion to stay loyal and close to our Creator, and out of a hatred for the enemy of this relationship, the deceptive klippos.<sup>11</sup>

## 8: Practical Tikkun Habris

“*Tikkun haBris*” means to get away from the klippos and return to living with Hashem.

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with Hashem, and in his Torah, Tefilah, Shabbos Kodesh, and all areas of avodas Hashem!

The way a person relates to the temptations that pull him the most is generally what determines whether he will attach himself to Hashem and live a spiritual life, or whether he will fall into the klippos, numbing his neshamah and living a life of shallow externalities.

Because of this, the main way we work on *shmiras haBris* is in the areas of immorality, because therein lies the strongest and most compelling klippos. In reality, though, *shmiras haBris* includes guarding ourselves from all klippos, which means any aveirah.

11. Over time, we can build our way up to the ultimate mindset of a Yid, which is that all of our actions, words, and thoughts revolve only around Hashem, and the joy of life is only found in our relationship with Him, and anything that does not connect to spirituality does not interest us in the slightest.

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The Arizal says that this *tikkun* is accomplished by fasting 84 times.

When we fast, we weaken our physicality, and through this, the klippos are removed from us. At the same time, our neshamah is strengthened, and we begin to live with Hashem with more clarity.

Most people have a hard time fasting,<sup>12</sup> and know that pushing themselves to fast will lead to less Torah learning or to negative feelings such as anger, sadness, and the like. In such cases, our Tzaddikim have instructed us that we can bring a *tikkun* through other types of good commitments that will strengthen us.<sup>13</sup>

But such commitments need to be made in this area - they should separate you from the klippos and draw you closer to Hashem, because that is what Bris is all about.

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12. Even with the *tikkun* of fasting, one who has a hard time fasting does not need to fast the number of times that the Arizal mentions, but can rather fast just once and substitute the rest of the fasts with giving *tzedakah*. Even though fasting many times is very difficult for most people, fasting one time is usually doable and brings a great *tikkun*.

13. Regardless of what your commitment is, it is good to make the commitment in the same way one would commit to a fast day — by accepting it upon yourself at the end of Mincha on the previous day, and by committing to do something for a specific amount of time (i.e. x amount of minutes per day for a week, a month, etc). This demonstrates that your intention is to follow your commitment as a substitute for fasting.

This will be different for each person, based on one's own circumstances and spiritual level.

A particularly special commitment is to make a habit of speaking with Hashem a little bit every day. Talk to Him in your own words about your spiritual ambitions and how much you want to become holy, and about anything else that is going on in your life, whether it relates to spirituality or not.

This not only helps you disconnect from that which is unholy, but it also directly helps elevate you, so that you grow closer to Hashem. This is a very important step towards living with Hashem and feeling His presence everywhere in life.

There is something else which is fundamental to a real *tikkun* in this area, and that is to commit to more Torah study, whether in quality or quantity.<sup>14</sup>

Through learning Torah, we disconnect from the bad and we also reach the good — the essence of the *bris*, closeness with Hashem, and that is our greatest pleasure.

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14. The Gemara (*Eiruv* 54a) teaches us: **הָחָשׁ בְּרֹאשׁוֹ יַעֲסֹק בְּתוֹרָה**, “One who has pain in his head, should toil in Torah.” The Maharsha asks (*Shabbos* 67a) that this should be forbidden because the Torah is not supposed to be used for the sake of healing. He answers that toiling in Torah is not done to heal the body from illness, but rather to heal the soul from sin. This is allowed. Once the neshamah is healed from sin, the body will automatically heal as well, because an illness of the body is only a physical manifestation of a spiritual flaw / illness.

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The core essence of not guarding the bris (*p'gam habris*) is that the person forgot about Hashem, and instead of living with *Ein Od Milvado*, he went after the lowly physical temptations.

The ultimate *tikkun* for this is learning Torah, because learning brings a person to awareness of Hashem and attachment to Him, because the Torah is Hashem's wisdom and it is the way He reveals Himself to the world.

Such Torah study should not be done in a superficial way! Rather, you should learn with *dveikus* — for the sake of attaching yourself to Hashem and becoming more aware of Him. Learn with joy, focus, and without interruption. If you can, make a commitment not to speak at all about anything other than the Torah as you are learning (*taanis dibbur*). This shows how much you want to fully connect to Hashem through your learning.



## CHAPTER TWO



### A Deeper Understanding of Bris

#### 1: Recognizing Hashem's Oneness

We explained in the previous chapter that the essence of “Bris” is to strive to live with *emunah* and feel Hashem’s presence in a clear and tangible way. We choose to live as His loyal and committed nation, and He rests the Divine Presence upon us.

This goes beyond rejecting the pull of the klippos and choosing to live with Hashem. The deeper mission is not just to make the right decisions by avoiding aveiros and choosing Hashem.

The ultimate goal, rather, is to get to a level where we fully recognize the Oneness of Hashem, and understand that there is nothing other than Hashem (*Ein Od Milvado*) and that the klippos are completely worthless.

Not only do we distance ourselves from evil, but we recognize that these klippos are utterly empty and devoid of even the slightest value. Not only do we

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take pleasure in Hashem, but we recognize that there is nothing outside of Hashem and no pleasure other than Hashem.

This is the true essence of the covenant Hashem made with Avraham Avinu — *To be for you a God and for your descendants after you*, meaning that we will recognize that Hashem alone is our God, and there is nothing else besides Him.

## 2: Absolute Oneness

The highest level of *emunah* is to believe and internalize that not only did Hashem create the world, and not only does He rule over and guide the world, but that Hashem is the entirety of existence, and there is no other true reality besides Him.

Not only is there no other power besides Him, but there is no other **existence** besides His. (Something that “exists” means that it maintains its own independent existence, as we will explain shortly.)

Before the world was created, there was nothing other than Hashem. Now that the world was created, there is still nothing other than Hashem.

So what do we see all around us? What we are seeing around us are people, places, and things that do not maintain their own existence, but rather only exist because — and for as long as — they are being infused

with life and sustained at every single moment by Hashem.

They have no abilities on their own at all. Every element of what they are and what they do is only happening because Hashem is continually choosing to sustain them.<sup>15</sup> Everything that Hashem created is another way that He reveals Himself in the world.

### 3: What Gives You Pleasure?

Recognizing the Oneness of Hashem is something that the Jewish people know on an intellectual level. But internalizing this until it is felt in your heart and truly experienced is not as easy to accomplish.

There are many levels of how much a person can recognize Hashem's presence and Oneness. Does he see Hashem in

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15. If we can live in this way, we can save ourselves from every pitfall of this world. Every single mistake we can make comes from either forgetting about Hashem, or from thinking that there is something else outside of Hashem.

But if we can live with the truth of reality with a full heart, we will find it easy to overcome temptations, because we will see that there is nothing there.

This brings us to live with Bitachon, because we trust Hashem fully and know that every single thing that happens is only from Him.

The more we acquire Bitachon, the less we will pursue honor, *taavah*, and jealousy, and the less we will fear anyone or anything. That is because we will know that all these things are just shells that cover over the light of Hashem, but the truth is there is only one reality in this world — Hashem!



everything and fully understand that there is **nothing** else at all, or are there still some things that he sees as independent of Hashem, where he does not see Hashem's role and reality.

One way to measure the level in which you have internalized *Ein Od Milvado* is by what your perspective is towards things and activities that are not mitzvos but are not forbidden.

If a person views such things as having their own source of pleasure, and not just a revelation of Hashem, then in a subtle way he is perceiving that there is something other than Hashem.

This is why the Torah instructs us to sanctify ourselves, קְדוּשִׁים תִּהְיוּ — קִדַּשׁ עַצְמְךָ בַּמֵּתָר לָךְ, *You shall be holy* (Vayikra 19:2), which Chazal explain means “*Sanctify yourselves through that which is permitted to you.*” This means to elevate and infuse holiness into the permitted pleasures of life.

As we are enjoying something in Hashem's world, we should understand that this thing has no pleasure by itself, and does not even exist on its own, but rather the fact that it exists and is enjoyable is only because of the light of Hashem that is within it.

#### 4: Everything is Hashem

When the klippos are not successful in getting us to forget

about Hashem entirely, they will try to at least get us to think about Hashem less, by trying to reduce the extent that we live with *Ein Od Milvado*.

These are “thin” klippos, that try to get us to partake in the permitted pleasures of this world without remembering Hashem, pulling us to see and enjoy these things as outside of Hashem’s Oneness, God forbid. After all, they argue, there is nothing wrong with enjoying yourself — these are permitted pleasures!

It is true that it is permitted, but there is a more sinister agenda here; the klippos are trying to pull the person to think that there is pleasure to be found outside of Hashem.<sup>16</sup>

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16. There are many levels of this.

There are those who know that Hashem is the primary power, but think that He gave over a bit of His power to “nature.” But such a person is forgetting that there is no such thing as “nature” at all! Rather, as the Chazon Ish defined it, “‘nature’ is (an expression of) the most frequent will of Hashem.”

This means that everything that happens in this world is a direct expression of Hashem’s will. At the particular moment of any occurrence, Hashem had made a decision that it would happen. Nothing happens on its own, ever.

But in order to give us free will, Hashem orchestrates that events occur frequently in the same exact manner, to the extent that humanity thinks we can predict events in a pattern we call “nature.” We also come to believe in a system we call “cause and effect,” and we come up with all kinds of rules of science, thinking we know what makes the world operate.

There is an even lower level, where a person believes in his heart that the

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Just as we uphold the Bris by avoiding the “thick” klippos that (completely) conceal the presence of Hashem, we also uphold the Bris by avoiding the “thin” klippos that conceal the Oneness of Hashem.

When we merit to uphold the Bris in this way, in its entirety, and remove even the thin klippos, we will merit a wondrous and deep revelation of Hashem’s Oneness, and can get to a level where we truly feel that there is nothing other than Hashem in every aspect of life.

This enables us to cling to Hashem with tremendous enjoyment, because we have fully internalized that only He is the source of true pleasure.

Even when partaking in a physical pleasure, we will understand that physicality itself has no existence or pleasure at all, and what we are experiencing is from the spark of Godliness that rests within it.<sup>17</sup>

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pleasures of the physical world are even more enjoyable than a spiritual pleasure. This borders on a heresy, because Hashem created the physical world and all of its pleasures come from Him, so it is impossible for a physical pleasure to be “better” than Hashem Himself!

17. Every physical pleasure comes from the spark of Hashem that rests inside of it, which is just cloaked in the physical thing. When a spark of Godliness descends to such a low physical place, it constricts itself to live in — and give life to — the physicality it is concealed in. When we experience that pleasure in an external way, we are accessing that spark, but the only thing we gain out of it is physical pleasure.

**This is the ultimate level of upholding the holy Bris — to understand that there is nothing outside of Hashem, and therefore to identify, reveal, and experience the spark of Hashem that dwells inside everything.**

All we want is Hashem, and the only pleasure we want is from Him.

## 5: Elevating Everything

This is the deeper meaning of *pri'ah*, about which Chazal say (*Shabbos* 137b): “One who did the *bris milah* but did not do the *pri'ah*,<sup>18</sup> it is as if he did not do the *bris milah*.”

The Zohar Hakadosh<sup>19</sup> explains that the skin on which we

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The wise one understands that there is much more pleasure that can be accessed here than that! A spark of Hashem, when accessed in the right way and with the proper intention, can give you a wondrous spiritual pleasure as well! When we think about where this physical pleasure comes from — Hashem — we awaken ourselves to cling to Him through this experience, and then we receive the highest pleasure possible — attachment to Hashem.

(As we will explain further in other places, this can only be done with a permitted pleasure. A forbidden pleasure — an *aveirah* — cannot be elevated by doing the *aveirah*; the only way to elevate the spark by an *aveirah* is to hold back and resist the temptation to do it. The act of avoiding the *aveirah* elevates the spark that lies there.)

18. Meaning, he removed the outer, thick foreskin but not the thin membrane under it.

19. *Parshas Shelach*, p. 163a (see *Masok MiDevash* there).

do *pri'ah* represents something called “*klippas nogah*,” which is a thin klippah that does not need to be cut off and removed but rather is moved aside to be joined with the realm of *kedusha*.

The *klippas nogah* is the source of anything that is permitted but is not a sin or a mitzvah.<sup>20</sup> The underlying idea of *pri'ah*, therefore, is that we do not have to cut off

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20. Things that are not forbidden but are not a mitzvah are called *klippas nogah*. These lie in the middle, between the side of the absolute klippos and the side of *kedusha*. *Klippas nogah* is not a strong klippah, and the potential is there for it to be elevated fully to the side of *kedusha* by using it properly.

A good example of this is eating. Food that is not kosher has a thick, strong, klippah on it. Such klippos cannot be elevated to the side of *kedusha*. The only way to access the spark of Hashem within forbidden food is by avoiding it.

But food that is permitted to eat has a *klippas nogah*. We are allowed to eat it, but we are tasked with sanctifying our eating, and bringing that klippah to the side of *kedusha*. The Torah instructs us to sanctify ourselves, as it says (*Vayikra* 19:2): קְדוּשִׁים תִּהְיוּ – קִדַּשׁ עַצְמְךָ בַּמֵּתָר לָךְ, *You shall be holy*, which Chazal explain to mean: “Sanctify yourselves through that which is permitted to you.” Use permitted things in a manner of *kedusha*.

How do we bring this klippah to the side of *kedusha*? By thinking about Hashem while we eat. Remember that the deliciousness of the food is not from the food, as if the food exists on its own and gives a good taste to itself, but rather that it is the spark of Godliness within it that gives it its existence and taste.

Through this you can use eating as means to cling to Hashem, as we explained in B'yam Darkecha — Darkei Avodah L'maaseh, in the essay on *achilah* (holy eating).

and remove such permitted activities, but we do need to sanctify them.

The way to elevate the *klippas nogah* is by using these things as needed, but not unnecessarily, with an understanding that there is no light or pleasure to be found in them on their own, except for the light of Hashem that is within them.

This is why “one who did the *bris milah* but did not do the *p’riah*, it is as if he did not do the *bris milah*.” If we only remove the thicker klippos, but not the thinner ones, we end up falling into the mistaken thought that there is something other than Hashem.

Although this level is not as bad as the *orlah* itself (i.e. doing an actual aveirah), nevertheless it still takes away from our understanding of the Oneness of Hashem. This is why our Bris is not fully complete until we can elevate these klippos as well.<sup>21</sup>

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21. Then we recognize with absolute clarity that the klippos are a false deception, while simultaneously recognizing with absolute clarity that everything is Hashem, *Ein Od Milvado*.

A Yid who achieves this reaches a level that all of his vitality and passion comes only from Hashem, and he clings to Hashem in thought, feeling, and action.

Every person needs to get their *chiyus* (vitality) from somewhere. It is human nature to pursue something that gives us joy and satisfaction. The goal of a Yid is to get that *chiyus* from Hashem Himself. Even when we interact with something in the physical world, our *chiyus* should not be obtained from the surface level, but rather we should look deeper and get our *chiyus* from the

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## 6: Summary: Three Levels of Bris

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Let's summarize the three components of the Bris and the practical steps to implementing them all into our life.

The first step, (removing the *orlah*) is to distance ourselves completely from things that are forbidden.<sup>22</sup> The second step (*Pri'ah*), is to sanctify the mundane, and the third step (revealing the *atarah*) is to return to live a life of closeness with Hashem.

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spark of Hashem that is within it.

22. Even within this step there are multiple levels. Even though the things the Torah prohibits are equally prohibited to all Jews, regardless of their level, there are things that are permitted to most people, but are considered forbidden to one who merits to refine himself and reach a higher level of spirituality. There is a higher risk that he will have a spiritual decline by doing that — even if he is trying to elevate it by using it with *kedusha*.

Each person should evaluate whether or not he needs a particular permitted pleasure. If you feel that you need it for your physical or mental health, or that if you do not have it, you will become agitated and not live with serenity, then you should make use of it, as needed, with *kedusha*.

But if you do not actually have a need for it, it won't be good for you to take it, even if you try to have the intention of using it with *kedusha*. The intention of *kedusha* only works to elevate something that you determine to be important and needed.

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Our job during these holy days of Shovavim is to work on all three of these components simultaneously.<sup>23</sup>

- 1) Commit to an additional step in distancing yourself from an actual aveirah. Not just for the sake of avoiding doing an aveirah, but with the mindset and recognition that there is **nothing there**, and its pleasure is nothing but deceptive, counterfeit, and utterly worthless.<sup>24</sup>
- 2) Choose a permitted pleasure, such as a certain food that you need and enjoy, and push yourself to try to see past the externals, and access and reveal the light of Hashem that is hidden within the food.

Contemplate and internalize that the goodness of that food is only from the light of Hashem that gives it its existence and taste.

- 3) Make a commitment to put in real effort to experience

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23. It is not necessary to fully achieve the first level before moving on to the second level, and so with the third. Our Tzadikim have taught us that this is not the way to approach growth in avodas Hashem. Rather, every person can access elements of multiple levels at once, and grow within each level one step at a time.

24. The goal is to get to a level where our hatred of evil is so engrained in our nature that we will be disgusted by sin and run away from it without even thinking.

This should be just like a person will naturally run away from fire. He does not need to first think about it until he internalizes the danger; he will just run!



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the existence and Oneness of Hashem in a more clear and tangible way. Seek the sweetness and pleasure in your relationship with Hashem and in Torah and Mitzvos.<sup>25</sup>

## 7: Every Little Bit Counts

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Do not be overwhelmed, wondering how you can possibly achieve the loftiest levels of *emunah*, where you live with *Ein Od Milvado* to the highest degree.

Know, my dear Yid, that if you take one small step, and make one small commitment, you have already entered the world of being a *baal teshuvah*, of returning to Hashem with your heart and soul.

By taking one small step, you are declaring in the depth of your heart that you want **only** Hashem. Yes, it will take some time to grow, one step at a time, until this desire can be achieved in all of your actions. But that is just a technicality, and with your commitment, you are declaring who you truly are and Who you are committed to.

**Hashem has tremendous joy and takes pride in such a Yid!** The Torah was not given to the angels, and Hashem does not expect us to achieve perfection overnight.

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25. Practical pathways and strategies to live with Hashem and develop spiritual pleasure in our avodas Hashem can be found in B'yam Darkecha — Darkei Avodah L'maaseh. Some of this will be written in the next chapter.

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Anyone who tries — **each person on his own level** — to live with Hashem more and more, and to direct his desires, pleasures, and ambitions towards Him, by understanding that there is nothing else besides Him, will merit to see the light of Hashem.

Hashem will open the gates of *emunah* and *dveikus* for him, and light up his world with the only true pleasure — a life of living with Hashem.



## CHAPTER THREE



### Practical Strategies

Now let us answer the big question: What can we do to merit living with Hashem with clarity, and how can we find meaning and pleasure in our avodas Hashem?

The answer is that truthfully, we do not need to be taught how to find pleasure in our relationship with Hashem, because doing so is ingrained in the very nature of our souls.

Every single Jew has a neshamah that wants — and can find — pleasure in our relationship with Hashem and in our avodas Hashem.

But in order to successfully feel and enjoy this relationship, there are a few points we need to pay attention to, as we will see in the following pages.

#### 1: Running Away from the Klippos

Firstly, we need to understand the nature of the klippos and the effect they have on our relationship with Hashem. The more a person chases after physical pleasure — and

even more so, if those are aveiros — the more the klippos will latch onto his soul, forming a layer and a barrier between the neshamah and Hashem.

The reality is that the more the soul is covered in klippos, the harder it will be for that person to feel connected to spirituality. The pleasure of his avodas Hashem becomes numbed, and this can lead to even the sweetest aspects of Yiddishkeit losing their appeal to him, because he just doesn't feel it anymore. Like someone who is sick, he may taste something sweet and experience it as bitter.<sup>26</sup>

Physicality and spirituality are opposites. If someone takes pleasure from physicality — and all the more so from an aveirah — then in accordance with how big that fall was, he will lose that much of the sweetness of spirituality.

He will lose in his spirituality the amount of pleasure he took from the side of physicality. This can get to the point where someone who is totally immersed in physical pleasures will sense only bitterness from his Torah and *tefillah*, and lose the spiritual pleasure of Shabbos — may Hashem have compassion.

Excessive physical pleasure and, to an even higher degree, forbidden physical pleasures, make the pleasantness and sweetness of Yiddishkeit lose their appeal and be experienced as bitter and difficult.

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26. See Rambam, *Hilchos Deos* 2:1.

This is why the yetzer hara tries so hard to cause us to stumble in areas of *kedusha*, because He knows that this will lead us to lose our enjoyment of every other area of Yiddishkeit as well.

This leads to an even worse place, because someone who doesn't get pleasure from his avodas Hashem will be drawn to seek that pleasure elsewhere, and the klippos will offer him all kinds of things that they are selling as "pleasure." This causes a chain reaction, because taking more pleasure from the klippos will only lead to even less pleasure from Yiddishkeit, which leads to more pleasure from the klippos. This is the vicious cycle of *aveirah goreres aveirah*, one sin leads to another sin (*Avos* 4:2).

This is why separating ourselves from the klippos is the crucial step we need to take in order to get what we are looking for — a close relationship with Hashem and passion and pleasure from avodas Hashem.

Every person, based on his unique level and circumstances, should do what he can to strengthen his *kedusha*, and avoid things that he knows will pull him down. Therefore, it is important to be careful to go to the *mikveh*, and to be extra vigilant about *kashrus*, and even more so, to guard your eyes and distance yourself from the impurities of technology.

The more we can cleanse ourselves of the klippos, the more we will merit to feel the light of Hashem and the

spiritual pleasure of Torah and mitzvos, and we will elevate all of our Yiddishkeit.

## 2: Tefillah

In order to beat the fight with the klippos, we must remember what Chazal teach us (*Succah* 52a): יִצְרוּ שָׁל אָדָם: ... וְאֶלְמָלָא הִקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא שְׁעוּזָר לוֹ, אֵינוֹ מִתְגַּבֵּר עָלָיו, בְּכָל יוֹם. "A person's evil inclination overcomes him each day... And if not for the Holy One, Blessed be He, Who assists him, he would not overcome it."

It is not possible for a person to win over the yetzer hara alone. It can only be done with the help of Hashem.

If one enters a fight with the yetzer hara with the mindset that he will win the battle due to his strengths, it is guaranteed that he will not succeed.

We need to enter the battle with the clear understanding that we can only win with Hashem by our side, helping us. We need to do our part to fight, but at the same time, we can never forget the true Source of success.

One who understands this will always daven for Hashem's help even before he faces a spiritual challenge. And certainly, during a challenge, he will ask Hashem for help in overcoming it.

We should keep this tefillah on our lips throughout the battle, without letting up until the challenge is over! Talking to Hashem and asking for His help during a

spiritual test is the key to success, and serves as a rope that attaches us to Him. If we hold on tightly to this rope without letting go throughout the test, we will surely pass the test.

### 3: Torah

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Besides separating from the klippos (avoiding the bad), there are things we can proactively do to awaken and illuminate our neshamah with closeness to Hashem (increasing the good).

The first is learning Torah with a sense of attachment to Hashem (*dveikus*), with focus, and without interruption (*b'ritzifus*).

Hashem gave us the Torah, which cleanses us and serves as an antidote to the yetzer hara, and purifies and elevates us to a higher level of spiritual clarity. Therefore, during this time of Shovavim we should commit to improve our learning in quality and in quantity.<sup>27</sup> Increasing our learning is the strongest tool we have for conquering our yetzer hara and coming closer to Hashem.

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27. It is a wonderful thing to establish a set daily learning so that slowly, over time, you can acquire knowledge of large areas of Torah.

For example, one who dedicates time to learn two chapters of *Navi* or *Kesuvim* each day will finish the entire *Nach* every year. One who learns a chapter and a half of Mishnayos every day will complete all of Mishnayos every year. And the same applies to any other routine of daily learning — even a small investment in a daily routine will enable you to learn large amounts of Torah over time.

However, in order for our learning to serve as the weapon that will overcome the yetzer hara and bring us closer to Hashem effectively, we need to learn in the right way: *lishmah*, for the sake of Hashem.<sup>28</sup>

Learning *lishmah* means that a Yid learns Torah, and wants to know the Torah, so that he can cling to Hashem and attach his soul to his Creator.<sup>29</sup>

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28. Even though our Sages teach us that one can learn *shelo lishmah* (*Sanhedrin* 105b), which means for an ulterior motive, the only reason for that is so that over time, learning for ulterior motives will eventually lead to learning *lishmah*.

The reason for this is that we need to harness our natural tendencies, channeling and directing them towards avodas Hashem.

For example, if someone's nature is that he craves honor, he should channel that tendency towards avodas Hashem by learning Torah for the sake of people giving him honor. In this way, he is using his nature to acquire more Torah.

But we must always remember the ultimate goal, which is that we really want to learn Torah with *kedusha* on the highest level — to learn *lishmah* and for no other reason.

Since we aren't perfect, sometimes we need to harness the power of our imperfect natural tendencies and direct them to the side of *kedusha*. But the moment we are able to, and to whatever extent we are able to, we should upgrade our learning to Torah *lishmah*. Even a small amount of learning *lishmah* elevates all our other learning.

29. The topic of what it means to learn *lishmah* is much bigger than what is written here. There are many different levels of it, and various perspectives, which are all valid and holy. Our focus here is on how to grow closer to Hashem



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This is the very reason Hashem gave us the Torah. Learning *lishmah* means to learn it according to its intended purpose— so that we can attach ourselves to Him, and grow closer and closer to Him.

This is the goal of learning. Not to “become something,” but just so that we can come to connect to Hashem more and more. Learning in this way, *lishmah*, brings a person to closeness with Hashem, because our ability to connect to Hashem is embedded in the Torah, and through that we can start to feel a deep, inner connection to our Creator. Learning with this intention is learning *lishmah*, and that should be our goal.

Besides having this intention when we start learning: “I am learning in order to attach myself to Hashem Who is revealed through the Torah,” we should really try to actually think about and feel the light of Hashem that lies in the holy words of the Torah.<sup>30</sup>

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through learning Torah, in the context of our general topic of *tikkun haBris*.

30. Especially if you are having a hard time understanding what you are learning, and your mind seems to be “closed” to the Torah, spend a little time trying to learn with *dveikus*, by repeating those words again and again with the intention to attach yourself to the living God, Whose light is infused in those words.

The way for you to measure success in Torah learning is by evaluating: “How much did I connect to Hashem through my learning?” not: “How much ground did I cover?” and not: “How thoroughly did I understand what I learned?”

It is particularly powerful to say the first few words of your learning several times in a row, and while you are repeating these words, try to think about and experience the tremendous light of Hashem that is infused within them.<sup>31</sup>

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The value of learning is measured by what your goal is in learning. If your goal is to connect to Hashem and to attach yourself to Him, such learning finds the highest level of favor in Hashem's eyes.

Therefore, how smart you are and how much *hatzlachah* (success) you have in your learning makes no difference whatsoever. The only thing that matters is to be someone who toils in Torah study using the abilities Hashem gave you, with the intention to merit through this: **וְאַתֶּם הַדְּבָקִים בְּהוֹי"ה אֱלֹקֵיכֶם הַיּוֹם כְּלָכֶם הַיּוֹם**, *You who cling to Hashem, your God, you are living today* (Devarim 4:4).

31. While you are in the middle of your learning, and your mind is immersed in the topic you are learning about, it is not very easy to be thinking thoughts of *dveikus*. Nevertheless, having the proper intentions when you begin to learn will make all of your learning considered to be fully *lishmah*.

Learning *lishmah* means that the reason you are learning is so that the learning will bring you closer to Hashem. If that is your intention as you begin your learning, then all of the learning is being done for that reason.

However, if you find yourself with some sort of interruption in your learning, even if you are just going to get a *sefer* or something, then it is great to take advantage of the opportunity and have the intention again: **אֲנִי לֹוֶמֵד כְּדֵי לְהִדָּבֵק בְּבוֹרְאִי**, *"I am learning in order to cling to my Creator."*

Then, when you return to your place and are ready to resume your learning, take a moment to start your learning with *dveikus* by having the intention to attach yourself to the light of Hashem which is within the words.

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When a Yid learns with the intention of attaching himself to Hashem, his learning is received with desire by Hashem, and he is given the sense of closeness he craves, and through this he can truly delight in the presence of Hashem, and merit a new level of **וְאֲנִי קִרְבָּת אֱלֹקִים לִי טוֹב**, *And for me, closeness to Hashem is good (Tehillim 73:28).*

#### 4: Talk to Hashem

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The next tool we can use is talking to Hashem. We should get ourselves used to talking freely with Hashem, and pouring our heart out to Him in our own words.

Besides for the benefit from every *tefillah* — we always gain when we ask Hashem for help — this also enables us to feel Hashem's presence with us. By talking to Hashem frequently, we are getting ourselves used to the fact that Hashem is always here with us!

Whenever anything happens, we should get ourselves used to talking to Hashem about it right away. This helps train us more and more to see that everything is from Hashem and everything is in His hands. The more we do this, the more this truth will be ingrained in the fabric of our souls, and it will become our instinct to always turn to Hashem first, because we know He is right there and that this too, is from Him.

Make a set time for talking to Hashem, and use it to pour out our hearts to Him, telling Him everything we are going through and all of our ambitions.

Tell Him how deeply you yearn to grow closer to Him, and how much you want to be good and to act properly, and about all the challenges you have and the spiritual tests you are going through. Ask Him to purify you and open your heart.

We should follow the lead of Dovid Hamelech, and do what he did throughout the entire book of Tehillim — he poured out his heart before his Creator, begging Hashem to be with him and help him overcome his challenges.

Hashem is our Father, and He waits eagerly for every single word that comes out of the mouths of us, His beloved children.

## 5: Holy Thoughts

Another important component of growing closer to Hashem is to think holy thoughts. We want to get ourselves into the habit of thinking about Hashem, and always feeling that He is here with us at all times.

Contemplate the fact that the entire world is filled with the glory of Hashem, and that His light spreads throughout every single element of creation, sustaining the entire world at every moment.

Look for Hashem in every single thing you see, and in every interaction you have.

Another important tool we have is to constantly envision Hashem's Name before us, as the Rama teaches us in the

very beginning of Shulchan Aruch: שְׁוִיֵּיתִי הו"ה לְנִגְדִי תָמִיד הוּא כָּלֵל גְּדוֹל בְּתוֹרָה וּבְמַעֲלוֹת הַצְּדִיקִים אֲשֶׁר הוֹלְכִים לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים, “*I place Hashem before me always* — This is a great concept in the Torah and is a paramount attribute for the righteous people who walk in the ways of God.”

Every growing Jew can and should utilize the powerful tool of thinking of the Name of Hashem, as the Arizal taught us.<sup>32</sup> This is a fundamental tool we can use to grow closer to Hashem, and is not something that only the greatest tzadikim can do.<sup>33</sup>

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32. See, for example, *Pri Eitz Chaim, Shaar Hanhagot HaLimud*.

The way to do this is by drawing the letters of Hashem's name in your mind, using the power of your mind and imagination.

Some people have an easy time doing this, and can create an excellent visualization of Hashem's Name, and even use different colors and other details. Other people have a much harder time doing this. There are many factors that have a bearing on this, including the nature of your mind and the spiritual level you are on.

Do not worry if you are not seeing a strong visualization in your mind. It is enough to just be thinking about the letters, either one letter at a time or the entire word at once, as if you are simply reading the letters in a book and then thinking about them in your mind.

33. This wondrous tool is a key that can unlock wondrous levels of attachment to Hashem and can help us navigate the many challenges of life. Every Jew who craves to elevate themselves can and should learn to use this tool. This should be done in accordance to each individual's spiritual level and life circumstances, in addition to all the other tools we use in our avodas

There is tremendous holiness in the letters of Hashem's Name, and when we visualize these letters, we access this light and infuse ourselves with deep spiritual vitality, which brings us closer to Hashem in wondrous ways.

Particularly, if the yetzer hara is causing us to think about or look at forbidden and unholy things, we should make every effort to use this tool that Hashem gave us, to visualize and focus on His holy Name. This has the power to burn away the yetzer hara from our mind.

The way to do this is simply to think about the Name of Hashem by drawing it in your mind so you can visualize it, or by looking at it written on a piece of paper.

The goal is not to just see it, but rather to feel in your heart the inner meaning of the Name of Hashem.

For example, the holy name הוי"ה is a name that signifies that Hashem is ויהיה, הוה, היה — Hashem was, is, and

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Hashem.

The great Halachic authority, the author of the Mishnah Berurah, writes about the significance of thinking of Hashem's name in the beginning of Shulchan Aruch: "It is good to think about the name of Hashem הוי"ה with the *nekudos* used for the word יִרְאַה."

{Ed. note: whenever you see the Hebrew letters הוי"ה in this *sefer*, it is a reference to the four letter Name of Hashem: yud - kei - vav - kei, and when you are visualizing such a Name, it should be in the correct order ו"ה and then ה"ו, without any quotation marks. We just wanted to avoid writing Hashem's Name explicitly in this publication, as is the case in the original Hebrew *sefer* as well.}

always will be. Therefore, while visualizing this Name, we should think about and try to feel that Hashem is the entirety of existence and that He alone sustains and gives life to all of creation.

The holy name אֲדֹנָי signifies that Hashem is the אֲדֹנָי הַכֹּל, the Master of everything. Therefore, while visualizing this Name, think about how Hashem is the Master of the world, and commit to the responsibilities we have as servants in His Kingdom.

If you are not familiar with the inner meaning of each particular Name of Hashem, then at the very least try to feel a sense of attachment to Hashem in a general way through the holy Name, and understand that by thinking about His name we access His light and come closer to Him.

Have the intention that by thinking about Hashem more and more, you are coming closer to Him and making yourself a chariot (*merkava*), a place where Hashem rests His holy Divine Presence.

Thinking holy thoughts is a crucially important component of the avodas Hashem of our generation.

By thinking holy thoughts, we kill the yetzer hara and banish it from our minds, whether it is thoughts of Torah, or thinking about Hashem's Name, or just thinking about Hashem's existence and your love for Him. This can also be accomplished by learning *seforim* that cause you to

think holy thoughts, or by saying Tehillim. All of these methods invite Hashem's presence down upon us, and bring us to live with Hashem in a palpable way.

All this brings us to experience tremendous pleasure and excitement in our Yiddishkeit.

## 6: Valuing the Pleasure of Serving Hashem

As a final note, it is worth emphasizing how important it is to feel joy and pleasure in our avodas Hashem.

Hashem wants us to experience the spiritual pleasure of serving Him, and this pleasure is a need of our neshamah.

Do not numb yourself from this spiritual pleasure with the mistaken notion that having such pleasure takes away from the *lishmah* of your avodas Hashem, as if Hashem does not want you to have it.

Getting joy and pleasure from our avodas Hashem is an absolutely crucial foundation in our Yiddishkeit. Through this, we internalize that there is no power other than Hashem, and that there is no pleasure to be found outside of avodas Hashem.

All the pleasure we can possibly experience in the world is to be found in our relationship with Him. All the goodness of the world lies right here, by the Yid who is serving Hashem with his heart and soul.<sup>34</sup>

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34. The reason to seek enjoyment in avodas Hashem is not so that we will feel pleasure, but rather because we desire a deep relationship with Hashem.



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Spiritual pleasure is the natural state of a neshamah that is connected to Hashem. Therefore, feeling the pleasure of a relationship with Hashem clearly does not mean that you have the wrong motives and that your avodas Hashem is not *lishmah*. On the contrary, the Torah calls on us to experience the goodness of our avodas Hashem, as it says: טַעֲמוּ וִרְאוּ כִּי טוֹב הוּא"ה, *Taste and see that Hashem is good* (Tehillim 34:9) and אַז תִּתְעַנֵּג עַל הוּא"ה, *Then you will take pleasure in Hashem* (Yeshayah 58:14).

The very purpose of creation is: וְלִהְיוֹת מְזִיז ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְהִתְעַנֵּג עָלָיו, "Man was created only to delight in Hashem and to bask in the light of His presence" (*Mesillas Yeshtarim*, Ch. 1) and the World to Come is a place where צַדִּיקִים יוֹשְׁבִין וְעֶטְרוֹתֵיהֶם בְּרָאשֵׁיהֶם וְנִהְנִים מְזִיז הַשְּׁכִינָה, "The righteous sit with their crowns upon their heads, enjoying the splendor of the Divine Presence."

"*Lishmah*" means to serve Hashem for the purpose of a connection to Him. The fact that one gets spiritual pleasure from this does not mean that it is not being done *lishmah*. It would only be considered not to be *lishmah* if the entire purpose of your service of Hashem was motivated by the desire for pleasure.

An indicator of whether one is serving Hashem *lishmah* or not is if he pursues pleasure in other things as well. If one is just looking for pleasure, he will be equally happy with it whether he gets it from spirituality or physicality.

But someone who is serving Hashem *lishmah* has no interest in getting pleasure from anything else, as all he desires is a deep relationship with his Creator. Experiencing the pleasure of this relationship is not merely an outcome of the relationship but rather an important part of the very nature of it.

## CHAPTER FOUR



### The Strength to Overcome

We have explained that we uphold the Bris by “living” with Hashem and revealing His presence. But in order to do this properly, we must separate ourselves from *taavos*.

Of course, there are many levels to this. The basic level is separating from actual aveiros, which every Jew is equally responsible to do. But beyond that, there are many levels of separation from the pleasures of the physical world, which are included in the mitzvah of: קְדוּשִׁים תִּהְיוּ — קִדָּשׁ: עֲצֻמָּה בְּמִצְוַת לָךְ, *You shall be holy* (*Vayikra* 19:2), which means: “Sanctify yourselves through that which is permitted to you.”

The battle is great! We so badly want to become holy and to constantly elevate ourselves higher and higher, but the yetzer hara puts up a strong fight as he tries to convince us that there is no need to avoid something that is permitted (or which he claims is permitted).

With the help of Hashem, in this chapter, we will share

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some tools we can use to wage this holy battle. We will review some of the earlier points and add some more.

## 1: Understanding the Value

The more we understand the value of something, the more we will find the strength to pursue it and achieve it. Therefore, the first tool is to understand the significance of living a life of *kedusha*.

Maintaining our *kedusha* and upholding our side of the Bris is the foundation of all of our avodas Hashem. If we betray this Bris and fall in areas of *kedusha*, the klippos will latch onto our neshamah and cover it over. This causes us to not feel the sweetness of spirituality, and even if we are technically still learning and davening, we will be doing all that with a distant heart and without a sense of closeness to Hashem.

This means that for a moment of physical pleasure, we may be forfeiting the quality of our avodas Hashem, and the sweetness of life itself! Some *taavos* can even lead to a very big spiritual fall, may Hashem have mercy.

Yet the way of Hashem is “*middah tova m'rubah*” (*Yoma* 76a). This means that Hashem's attribute of goodness is always stronger than His attribute of justice. If we have so much to lose by falling for the klippos, all the more so, how much there is to gain by overcoming them!

So if we *do* make ourselves holy by resisting temptation,

we will get closer to Hashem and will be able to feel His presence. We will enjoy the great pleasure described as (*Tehillim* 73:28): *For me, closeness to Hashem is good.* As a result, every aspect of our lives will become elevated, and our Torah study, our davening, and all of our avodas Hashem will rise to a whole new level, immeasurably higher than before.

When we understand how important this is, this gives us the capabilities and the motivation to pass these tests.<sup>35</sup>

## 2: Understanding Gives Strength

Our nature is that we have a hard time doing things

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35. Every Yid naturally yearns for closeness to Hashem, but sometimes one might mistakenly think that this is only a level for *tzadikim*.

We need to remind ourselves that we, too, can merit *dveikus* and closeness with Hashem. Every Yid is a child of Hashem, and if Hashem created you, that is a clear sign that He knows you can succeed spiritually. By remembering this, we can find the strength to push through and withstand the temptations around us, and daven to Hashem to draw us closer to Him.

Push away the yetzer hara that tries to weaken your resolve by saying things like: "Who are you that you should feel pleasure in your avodas Hashem?" This is not for you, it is only for big *tzadikim*!" and the like. The reality is that if we listen to this yetzer hara enough, it can actually cause us not to feel our connection with Hashem.

Instead, tell yourself with conviction and strength: "**Am I not a Jew, a portion of Hashem Himself? Of course I am worthy and destined to feel the light of Hashem and to rejoice in His presence!**"

we do not understand. If we don't know what we are accomplishing and why we should do it, we will not feel satisfaction and meaning from doing it.<sup>36</sup>

If we do not know why we should separate from even permitted physical pleasures, it will be very difficult to do so. And vice versa, if we do understand why it is important and what we are accomplishing, we will gain a lot of strength in this battle and find it much easier to do.

This is why we need to remind ourselves of the reason we are doing this. As we've explained in the previous chapters, physical pleasures that are not for the sake of our avodas Hashem are a fraudulent deception of the klippos. Besides for the fact that these pleasures are shallow and fleeting, they also cover over our neshamah, which damages our avodas Hashem in other areas.

Hashem urges us to separate from these shallow pleasures for our own good! He knows that besides saving us from

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36. The yetzer hara tries to convince us that as long as we are learning and davening and doing chessed, what is wrong with a bit of physical pleasure? And why would the Torah tell us to avoid something that we naturally crave?

Part of the challenge comes from the fact that Hashem wants us to pursue the pleasure of a relationship with Him (לְהִתְעַנֵּג עַל הַשֵּׁם). And by creating us in this way, He created our very nature to be one of pursuing pleasure. It's no wonder that it is hard for us to fight our nature by avoiding physical pleasure as well!

The answer to that problem is that when the Torah instructs us to avoid certain things, that is to save us from the empty, deceptive pleasures of the yetzer hara, in order to guide us to the true pleasure of closeness to Hashem.

the bitterness of the klippos, separating from physical pleasure is what leads us to experience the true pleasure of closeness to Him.

Just knowing this can give us a lot of strength to overcome these *taavos*, and to pursue the real pleasures of life.<sup>37</sup>

### 3: Getting Pleasure the Right Way

Another thing we should remember that can help us overcome a test is: **Hashem is not asking you to avoid getting pleasure, but rather to get your pleasure in the right way!!!**

The greatest and most authentic pleasure comes from

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37. It is worthwhile to internalize this simple truth: When Hashem forbade certain things, it was not because He wanted to make things difficult for us, God forbid, but rather because He knows that these things are bad and bitter for our soul.

Therefore, since He is our trusted and compassionate Father, He urges us not to listen to the yetzer hara who hates us, but rather to our Father Who loves us! Hashem reminds us in the Torah that we are a holy nation and our neshamah is holy and pure and derives no pleasure from the klippos.

If a wicked and dangerous person who hates you offered you delicious looking food, you would not touch it, because you know that there is definitely some kind of bad intention there. If you were offered sugar-coated poison, you would have no temptation to eat it whatsoever.

This is the underlying principle for overcoming *taavos*: We have to understand and believe that the klippos are poison and that true pleasure can only be found with Hashem.

following the ways of Hashem! Our neshamah gets a tremendous amount of pleasure from overcoming a *taavah*, and a life of *kedusha* is a life of true inner joy and satisfaction.

On the other hand, everyone knows from his own experience (each on his own level), **that a fall in kedusha is followed by a terrible feeling of bitterness, and overcoming a temptation is followed by a wondrous feeling of sweetness and inner satisfaction.**<sup>38</sup> It is specifically the exercise in discipline and self-control that leads to true pleasure.

Understanding the truth of the two options helps us make the right decision. On one side is the true light and eternal pleasure of a close relationship with Hashem, and on the other side is a moment of pleasure followed by bitterness.

#### **4: Overcoming is the Greatest Pleasure**

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It's not just that overcoming the *taavah* prevents us from the misery that would follow from running after the klippos. The exercise in restraint and self-control itself brings the neshamah close to its Lifesource to bask in the

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38. This can be used as an excellent strategy to help you make the right decision in the heat of the struggle — reminding yourself of the joy you once had when you overcame the yetzer hara, and the bitterness you once felt when you did not.

light of the Living King, and this brings the neshamah a tremendous amount of pleasure!<sup>39</sup>

Any act of restraint is good for our neshamah, but *shmiras haBris* brings more pleasure than anything else.

Through overcoming the *taavah*, a Jew breathes new life into his soul, bringing it to cleave closer to its Creator.

## 5: Loyalty

The Arizal taught us that the *middah* (spiritual attribute) of *Yesod*, which represents *kedushah* and *shmiras haBris*, stands on a foundation of the attributes of *Netzach* and *Hod*.

In order to succeed in the *middah* of *Yesod*, which means to faithfully preserve our connection to Hashem and our recognition of His absolute Oneness, we need to use the *middos* of *Netzach* and *Hod*.

*Netzach*, which literally means “victory,” represents holy chutzpah – a boldness, audacity and stubbornness within a holy context. This is our ability to stubbornly do the will

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39. It is clear and undeniable that only people who serve Hashem and keep the mitzvos have real pleasure in life. The more we separate from the klippos, the happier we will be. (And though we may not always feel this so much, because we get distracted from that pleasure, it is still there, waiting for us. That's why, when a person has extended periods of calm, especially in his later years, he really does feel that pleasure. All of us also sense this to some extent on Shabbos and Yom Tov.)



of Hashem even when there is a difficult test, and even if we feel darkness and spiritual disconnect.

When the yetzer hara tries to convince us that the goodness is with him, we need to get some help from the attribute of *Netzach*, so we can stand up and declare: **“I will stubbornly remain loyal to my beloved Creator, in every situation!”**

We also need the *middah* of *Hod*, which literally means “to acknowledge,” and it represents our ability to acknowledge the truth that every single thing is from Hashem.

When the yetzer hara tries to present us with a compelling *taavah*, we need to get some help from the attribute of *Hod*, so we can stand up and declare: **“I will not listen to you!! I know that truth and goodness can only be found with Hashem!”**

By fighting with stubbornness and holy chutzpah for the sake of Hashem (*Netzach*), together with our ability to recognize with clarity that everything is from Hashem and that there is no good to be found outside of Him (*Hod*), we can succeed in overcoming the deception of the yetzer hara and standing with firm loyalty to uphold the Bris.

## **6: Run from the Yetzer Hara!**

Is very important to avoid entering into “negotiations”

with the yetzer hara. The moment he approaches you with his bad idea, tell him off sharply and say: "I have no interest in listening to any of these ideas!"

If a person starts to debate and discuss the idea, and even entertains the idea in any shape or form, he is giving the yetzer hara an opening to exploit. The yetzer hara latches on to any opening, and slowly over time he can drag the person down more and more.

Therefore, the moment you realize that the one who is presenting this "idea" to you is the yetzer hara, run away from the idea completely! Even if the idea isn't clearly "bad," if you can identify that the idea came from the yetzer hara, tell him off with conviction: **"I have no business with you whatsoever!"**<sup>40</sup>

## 7: You Fall Down, You Get Back Up

Sometimes, a Yid has the desire to grow, but the yetzer hara tries to get him to give up and lose hope, by telling him that since he had a fall in his *kedusha*, he is no longer a holy person, God forbid.

Such thoughts bring him to feel distance from Hashem and sadness. Then the yetzer hara tries to entice him

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40. Part of this mindset is to stay far away from places where a person knows he'll encounter the yetzer hara. The wisest of men, Shlomo HaMelech, spoke about this many times in *Mishlei*, for example (5:8): *Keep your path far from [the yetzer hara], and do not approach the door of her house.*"

even more, by arguing that since he fell anyway and is far from Hashem, he may as well enjoy the pleasures of the physical world.

The proper response to this is to focus on the good that you have, and remind yourself: “I am good, and I do mitzvos, and I yearn to grow closer to Hashem. Just the fact that I am pained when I don’t feel close to Hashem is itself a clear sign that I am a loyal Jew!”

In this way, you can awaken the goodness within you to overcome your mistakes. *Chazal* teach us (*Koheles Rabbah* 1:13) that human nature is **יֵשׁ לוֹ מִנֵּה רוֹצֶה מְאֹדִים**, “One who has one hundred wants to have two hundred.” We naturally desire to have more of what we have. The only question is: What do you have?

The yetzer hara tries to convince a person who had a spiritual fall that he has lost all his spiritual connection, and that all he has left is his *gashmiyus* (physicality). If someone thinks that all he has is *gashmiyus*, he will naturally just want more and more of it, God forbid.

But the truth is that there is no such thing as a Jew who has lost all of his spiritual connection! Every Jew has something good about him or something good that he has done. We need to see ourselves as possessing goodness, because if we focus on the spiritual goodness that we do have, we will naturally want more and more of that.

When it comes to whether we feel Hashem’s closeness,

every Jew must know that Hashem is always with him at every single moment and in every situation.

## 8: If You Fall, Start Afresh Immediately

Another crucial principle, one of the most important pathways to attaining holiness, is not to be thrown off if you fall.

**If you have a spiritual fall, do not pay any attention to it whatsoever. Just get back up and start again immediately, and do teshuvah for the past.<sup>41</sup>**

Although it is exceedingly valuable and precious to have never had a fall in *kedusha*, nevertheless, the ability to get back up after a fall and do *teshuvah* is itself a fundamental component of the *middah* of *kedusha*.

We must internalize this in our hearts with steadfast

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41. *Chazal* teach us (*Sotah* 36b) that in line with the greatness of Yosef Hatzadik, to some extent, he did have a spiritual fall in the story with the wife of Potiphar. Nevertheless, he immediately overcame that fall, and was not broken from it. He was not thrown off whatsoever from that, and he just continued to serve Hashem like it never happened. It was specifically this attitude that led him to reach the highest level of *tzaddik* (*tzaddik yesod olam*).

Although we have no understanding of such things, and what it means that such a *tzaddik* had some kind of fall relative to his lofty levels, the reason *Chazal* speak in this manner is so that we, in later generations, can learn from it. Because of this *Chazal*, we can believe in our ability to get back up right away after a spiritual fall, and do *teshuvah*, and merit an even higher level of *kedusha* than we ever had.

clarity! “Even if I fall, Hashem never abandons me, and I am still a good Jew, because the core essence of my identity is that I am a *cheilek Elokah me’maal* (part of Hashem Himself). {See footnote<sup>42</sup>}

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42. You may ask: Doesn't this give us an opening to do aveiros? If Hashem is with us no matter what we do, and He stays by our side through all of our ups and downs, what difference does it make whether I do mitzvos or aveiros? Hashem is always with me and I am always a good Jew because I am a *chelek Elokah memaal*!

The answer lies in the words of the passuk (Hoshea 14:10): **כִּי יֵשְׁרִים דְּרָכָי הוֹיָה: יִצְדִּיקִים יִלְכּוּ בָם וְנִפְשָׁעִים יִפְשָׁלוּ בָם**: For the paths of Hashem are upright, the righteous walk on them, while sinners stumble on them.

The ways of Hashem were created in this way, that one who is looking to distort them and justify doing the wrong thing can find an opening to exploit. But someone who walks upright, with truth, will not stumble.

All we are saying here is that even if someone had a spiritual fall and got dirty, Hashem loves Him and he is still a good person. But who would be foolish enough to hurt himself intentionally by rolling around in the dirt? Obviously, you are far better off doing the right thing and being in a state where Hashem loves you without getting dirty!

Hashem loves us like a father loves his child — in every circumstance. But just because a child is loved at all times does not mean that he should do things that cause his father pain. Even though his father will always love him, a son always wants to bring his father pride and joy.

A Yid who truly seeks the ways of Hashem would never intentionally do an aveirah with the mindset that it doesn't matter. On the contrary, because he wants Hashem to be happy with him and he wants a very close relationship with Him, he does everything he can to stay away from sin.

If you tell such a person that Hashem will be with him even if he does an

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aveirah, that will not cause him to go and do an aveirah, because he knows that this causes pain to Hashem and causes his neshamah, which is a *chelek Elokah mema'al*, to get dirty and covered in klippos!

The whole concept that Hashem is with us even if we fall will only help someone who unfortunately failed a test and had a fall. By reminding himself of this true fact — that Hashem is still with him — he can gather the inner strength to get back up again. But this should never cause someone to be lax in his avodas Hashem or to just go and do an aveirah.

Someone who misuses this concept and does an aveirah with the mindset that “it doesn’t matter anyway because Hashem is still with me” needs to be reminded of what *Chazal* teach us, **הַאֹמֵר אַחֲטָא וְאֶשׁוּב אֵין מְסַפִּיקִין בְּיָדוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת**, **תְּשׁוּבָה**, “One who says: I will sin and then I will repent, Heaven does not provide him the opportunity to repent.”

Although Hashem is with us at all times, there is still a system of justice, and one cannot just say that “Hashem doesn’t mind,” God forbid. As the Gemara teaches us (*Bava Kamma* 50a): **יִתְּרוֹ חַיֵּינוּ: הוּא, וְתָרַן הוּא בְּרוּךְ הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא וְתָרַן הוּא**, “One who says that Hashem will let go of sin (i.e. without his *teshuvah*) is letting go of his life.”

If a person does aveirah and does not do *teshuvah*, he will be held accountable for it. This is like a son who gets sick, and his father needs to put him through a painful medical procedure to get rid of the bacteria.

But if we, on our own, return to Hashem by doing *teshuvah*, we are essentially telling Hashem: “I made a mistake by going after the klippos, and now I understand that there was nothing there worth taking!”

Through this, we are cleansing ourselves of the “bacteria,” because the root of the damage of an aveirah was the very fact that we betrayed Hashem. By acknowledging this and coming back to Him, we rectify the root problem, and so the “bacteria” goes away without needing a “painful medicine” (i.e. punishment for the aveirah).

Do not focus on the past, because the way of *kedushah* is that: **שֶׁבַע יָפֹל צַדִּיק וְקָם**, *The righteous one falls seven times and gets back up again* (Mishlei 24:16).

We should view every day as if all we have in the world is this single day, and renew ourselves in our avodas Hashem as if nothing ever happened in the past and we were born today. With this approach, we can see every moment as a new opportunity to serve Hashem with renewal and passion.<sup>43</sup>

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But we must remember that Hashem probes our hearts and always knows our innermost thoughts and intentions. Hashem knows whether we are sincere about our *teshuvah*, or whether we were already planning the *teshuvah* while we were doing the aveirah itself. If this thought process was our plan all along, that shows it was not a sincere *teshuvah*. That is the meaning of: “One who says: I will sin and then I will repent, Heaven does not provide him the opportunity to repent.”

43. This is not just a nice saying — it is the truth. At every single moment, we are tasked with a brand new mission, and the thought that a previous failure should affect this moment's mission is nothing but a deception of the yetzer hara.

Every single moment, we are being tasked as messengers to reveal Hashem in the world, and this task has no connection whatsoever to the task of the previous moment.

As an example, imagine a store owner who is trying to sell his product to a customer. While trying to sell his product to one particular customer, he makes a mistake in his sales pitch that turns off the customer and causes him to leave the store without buying. Would it cross the storeowner's mind to stop trying to sell his product because he failed with one customer?? Of course not! He will

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## CHAPTER FIVE



### Leaving Mitzrayim

#### 1: The Connection Between Bris and Shovavim

The Arizal taught us<sup>44</sup> that the time period during which we read the Parshiyos of *Shemos*, *Va'era*, *Bo*, *Beshalach*, *Yisro*, and *Mishpatim* (the first Hebrew letter of each of these words spell out the word Shovavim שׁוּבָבִים), is an auspicious time to work on *tikkun haBris*.

What is the connection between the weeks of Shovavim and the work of *tikkun haBris*?

The answer is that during these weeks, we read the parts of the Torah that tell us about the slavery in Egypt, the Exodus from Egypt, and our receiving of the Torah.

There is a concept that reading about an idea in the Torah awakens within us the energy to utilize that particular area in our lives. So when we read from the Torah, we are

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try again with the hopes that he will make the sale with the next customer!

44. See *Shaar Ruach HaKodesh*, *Tikkun* 27.



absorbing the strength to internalize that particular idea and incorporate it into our avodas Hashem.<sup>45</sup>

Therefore, by reading these 6 *parshiyos*, we awaken within ourselves the spiritual energy that lies in the stories of the slavery in Egypt, the redemption, and the receiving of the Torah.

The Arizal teaches us<sup>46</sup> that the reason the Jewish people needed to endure the slavery in Egypt was to bring a *tikkun* (rectification) for the betrayal of the Bris of the very first person — Adam HaRishon — and the generation of the *Mabul* (Great Flood).

When we read these *parshiyos*, we awaken the spiritual energy of *tikkun haBris*. This is the connection between Shovavim and *tikkun haBris*.

## 2: Our Personal Redemption from Egypt

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These holy weeks give us the ability to leave behind the “slavery of Egypt” and to receive the Torah and to repair any damage we caused through our aveiros.

The slavery in Egypt represents being enslaved to the klippos that try to cover over the Divine truth. The Hebrew

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45. This is the inner dimension of the halacha that we are supposed to learn the relevant halachos of each Yom Tov on that Yom Tov. By learning the Torah about that particular time, we awaken that particular spiritual energy that is embedded in that part of the Torah.

46. See *Shaar HaKavanos, Pesach, Derush 1*.

word Mitzrayim also reads as מצר-ים, which means the one that “constricts the ocean.” Mitzrayim — the klippos — constricts the vast ocean of wisdom, and pulls us to live superficially, thinking only of nature, while hiding the inner truth.

Being enslaved in Egypt means to see everything in a narrow and constricted way. When our vision is shallow, we cannot identify the light of Hashem that lies beneath the surface of every single thing in existence. “Mitzrayim” is to look at things with our physical eyes without having the ability to see beneath the surface.

If someone falls into the klippos, thinking that the natural world maintains its own existence, without seeing beyond and beneath what his eyes can see — and certainly if he thinks that true goodness can be found in these klippos — then he is imprisoned behind the walls of “Mitzrayim” and enslaved to the illusion of the klippos.

These klippos that have enslaved him will give him a lot of hard work in many different ways! Besides pulling him towards empty pleasures, by covering up the presence of Hashem they force him to put in excessive amounts of effort (*hishtadlus*) in so many areas. They also create confusion and foggiess that prevents him from feeling the spiritual side of reality.

This can cause the person, God forbid, to forget his true purpose in this world, and the reason he was created — to recognize Hashem and cling to Him.

This itself damages the Bris (*p'gam habris*), because by

doing *aveiros*, specifically *aveiros* that relate to kedusha, a person is showing that he thinks the klippos have their own existence, as if there is something that is worth pursuing outside of Hashem.

The more a person thinks with the mindset of the klippos, the more power he gives them to rule over him, as *Chazal* teach us (*Makkos* 10b): בְּדֶרֶךְ שְׂאֲדָם רֹצֶה לֵילֵךְ מוֹלִיכִין אוֹתוֹ: “Man is led along the path he wishes to follow.” This leads him down a terrible spiral, because the more power they have, the more they entice him. And the more he takes what they offer, the more he forgets Hashem, and this gives them more power over him, and so on — may Hashem have compassion.

There are many levels in all of this, but in a general sense, the inability to experience the light of Hashem is called “being enslaved to Mitzrayim,” and that is what it means to not uphold the Bris, because the Bris means to remember Hashem and see Him in the world.

### 3: Leaving Mitzrayim through Clear Emunah

Hashem struck the Egyptians to demonstrate to the world that the natural world we see is not the true power, so that we will see beneath the externals and understand that Hashem is the only true Power.

The moment that Hashem’s truth is revealed, the klippos automatically vanish, just like darkness vanishes the instant the light is turned on. The darkness does not need

to be “removed,” because its existence is not real. It is just what remains when the light is concealed.

Then, the klippos humble themselves before Hashem, and even the Egyptians have no choice but to admit to the truth, and the whole world sees that Hashem is God.

The Jewish people then go free from under their control to become the cherished nation of Hashem and to reveal the holy truth to the world: The external world is nonexistent, the only true reality is Hashem, Who is the Source of everything!

Through the *makkos* (plagues), the Jewish people were redeemed from the slavery of the klippos, and started to see the world in the proper way.

Step by step, they were able to elevate themselves more and more until they merited the ultimate revelation of Hashem when they received the Torah at Sinai. Through the Torah, they were able to connect to Hashem and draw his Divine Presence to rest upon them.

When we read these *parshiyos* each year, we awaken this same spiritual energy, and every one of us receives a powerful ability to strike at the klippos and to be freed from his personal constriction and slavery, elevating ourselves to a higher and deeper level of connection with our beloved Creator.



# Kedusha

# INTRODUCTION



**קְדוּשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי הוִי"ה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם**

*You shall be holy because I, Hashem, Your God, am holy.*

*(Vayikra 19:2)*

Kedusha is the gateway to all of avodas Hashem. Only by attaining holiness can we successfully develop our attachment to Hashem. Through holiness, our neshamah connects with its Lifesource and invites the Divine Presence to rest upon us. Then the klippos, the evil entities that serve as a barrier between us and Hashem, flee, allowing us to live a true life of closeness and connection with Hashem .

But without Kedusha, the klippos grasp onto us, blurring our spiritual vision and blocking our connection with Hashem. The stronger the grasp of the klippos, the more we will be held back from feeling a connection with Hashem and living with *emunah*, God forbid.

This is why Hashem urges us, in so many places in the Torah, to sanctify ourselves. This is the foundational starting point in all of our Judaism — to be a *holy nation to Hashem our God* (Devarim 14:2).



## CHAPTER ONE



### What is Kedusha?

#### 1: Kedusha is Connection

Kedusha – holiness – means to be dedicated and attached to Hashem. Just as a married woman is called “*mekudeshes*,” sanctified, to her husband, which means she is attached and committed only to him, in a similar way, we should be devoted and committed only to Hashem. Our relationship with Him is life itself!

In order to merit this close relationship, we have to separate ourselves from everything that serves as a barrier between us and Hashem and prevents us from attaining holiness.

“Kedusha” means to separate from several types of barriers that distance us from Hashem. The most significant way to attain kedusha is to guard ourselves from forbidden relationships,<sup>1</sup> but other areas of kedusha

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1. As it says in the Torah (*Vayikra* 19:2) דְּבַר אֵל כָּל עַדְת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם (Speak to the people of Israel and tell them: קְדָשִׁים תְּהִי כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי הוּא ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם

include guarding ourselves from *avodah zarah* (idolatry),<sup>2</sup>

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*You shall be holy, for I, Hashem Your God, am holy.* Rashi explains that *You shall be holy* means that you should separate yourself from immorality and forbidden relationships.

The klippos that come from immorality are so strong and detrimental to our relationship with Hashem that it is crucial not only to avoid the sin of immorality, but to set up safeguards and remain in a state of vigilance to avoid coming anywhere close to these klippos.

*Chazal* teach us that no matter who we are or how lofty our level of avodas Hashem is, one can never become complacent and let down his guard to avoid immorality. We cannot be fully confident in ourselves that we won't sin (אֵין אִמְפִּיקוּס לַעֲרִיּוֹת), and we must set up safeguards to distance ourselves from this battlefield altogether. Our ability to be successful against this powerful yetzer hara lies in the safeguards we put in place to avoid getting near the temptation in the first place.

But all of this should be done with joy! We should remind ourselves and the people we have influence on that setting up these safeguards is an amazing and very worthwhile thing to do! After all, these klippos are the bitter enemy of our soul, and staying away from them will enable us to live a true life of closeness and connection to Hashem.

Whenever it comes to adding fences to safeguard our kedusha, one should not pay any attention to someone he knows who seems to be neglecting his kedusha and is not using safeguards. One should judge his friend favorably, while at the same time not allowing his friend to influence him or cool down his desire for kedusha. Every Jew who wants to have a close relationship with Hashem is responsible for guarding his own soul so he can maintain his holiness.

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2. As it says in the Torah (*Vayikra* 20:7): וְהִתְקַדְּשִׁיתָם וְהִיִּיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים, *You shall sanctify yourselves and you shall become holy.* Rashi explains that this is an instruction to separate oneself from idolatry.



from eating non-kosher food,<sup>3</sup> and from becoming *tamei* (impure), so that we can separate from every barrier that distances us from Hashem.<sup>4</sup>

The common denominator in all of these is that they create klippos and impurities. Hashem wants us to avoid anything that will get in the way of our relationship with Him.

If a person falls into the grasp of the klippos, God forbid, his heart becomes clouded over and he loses his ability to feel a connection with Hashem. This prevents him from feeling good and satisfied about his spirituality, leading him to look for more satisfaction from the klippos themselves. As this painful cycle continues, he is led to feel even less connection with Hashem, God forbid, which leads to more impurity and klippos. As *Chazal* teach us

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3. As it says in the Torah (*Vayikra* 20:26): **וְהִיִּיתָם לִי קְדוֹשִׁים כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי הוּא**, *You shall be holy to me, for I, Hashem, am holy*. This is said in reference to eating forbidden foods. *Chazal* teach us that eating non-kosher food contaminates us and clogs our heart and mind from our connection with Hashem (see *Yoma* 39a).

We must be exceedingly careful with the food that we allow into our mouths, and make sure we know for a fact that it is properly kosher. We should not rely on a kosher certification that we do not recognize, even if the person selling us the food appears to be a religious Jew. If we are not vigilant, we may accidentally violate many prohibitions through the food we eat, God forbid.

4. Kohanim are instructed to be even more careful about maintaining their kedusha than non-Kohanim.

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(Avos 4:2): *aveirah goreres aveirah*, one sin leads to another sin.

Therefore, the starting point for someone who wants to have a close relationship with Hashem is to begin to break free of the grasp of the klippos that prevent this closeness.

Kedusha does not just mean to separate ourselves from the klippos. Rather, separating from the klippos is the starting point to kedusha, which is for our heart to be fully committed to Hashem, just as a committed wife is attached and dedicated to her husband, sharing the same vision and supporting him in many areas. A committed wife does not just mean that she does not ever betray him – that is just the most basic starting point!

Therefore, part of the process of attaining kedusha, besides avoiding things that get in the way of our relationship with Hashem, is that we need to do things that proactively bring us closer to Hashem, such as learning Torah, davening, doing mitzvos and working on our sense of attachment to Hashem (*dveikus*). This is how we proactively strengthen our relationship with Hashem.<sup>5</sup>

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5. The ultimate goal is to reach a level of kedusha where you only desire all that is holy. Life itself becomes a pursuit of holiness, and all you want is to engage in Torah and avodas Hashem. You have no interest in anything else, and you have a disgust and hatred for anything unholy that would distance you from Hashem.

This is not a level that is achieved overnight, but it is what we can strive towards as we grow more and more in areas of kedusha. First, we take a step

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## 2: Sanctify the Mundane

The Ramban teaches us that when the Torah tells us to “be holy” (*Vayikra* 19:2), it is urging us to “sanctify ourselves with that which is permitted to us.” An important component of attaining holiness is to separate ourselves not only from that which is forbidden, but even to abstain from things that are permitted if they are not being elevated into a form of avodas Hashem.

The obvious question is: Why? Why is it important to abstain from something that is permitted for us to do?

The answer is that the mission of the Jewish soul in this world is not just to go through the motions of following the Torah and doing the mitzvot.

Our mission is to live a life of attachment and closeness to Hashem, to live with and experience His presence in our lives at all times.<sup>6</sup> To know, with absolute clarity, that He

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to distance ourselves from *aveiros* and temptations, each person in accordance with his own circumstances and on his own spiritual level.

By separating from the klippot, our heart becomes more purified and can more easily experience closeness with Hashem. This leads to more passion for mitzvot, more hatred of evil, and more separation from the temptations, which we start to see as the bitter enemy of our relationship with Hashem. Then we will progressively get more joy and inner satisfaction from our relationship with Hashem, which makes us want to safeguard ourselves even more from anything that could take away the kedusha we've attained. This is the cycle of *mitzvah goreres mitzvah*, one mitzvah leads to another mitzvah (*Avos* 4:2).

6. The underlying purpose of all the holy mitzvot we are required to do is

is here,<sup>7</sup> that He is the One and only Source of everything we experience, to fully believe that Hashem alone is the Source of all goodness, and that there is no pleasure to be obtained outside of our relationship with Him.

To live in this way is to live with the truth of *Ein Od Milvado* (*Devarim* 4:35) there is nothing other than Hashem.<sup>8</sup>

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that through them we will start to recognize the presence of Hashem more and more, and by doing mitzvos, we can grow closer and closer to Him.

In a similar way, the underlying reason why we are prohibited from sinning is because sinning causes us to forget about Hashem, and drift away from Him.

As the Zohar Hakadosh writes (*Parshas Yisro*, p. 82b), the 613 mitzvos are “613 strategies” on how to get closer to Hashem. Obviously, this does not mean that the mitzvos are no more than strategies and recommendations! They are certainly obligations, but nevertheless, you see from this Zohar that their underlying purpose is to help us grow in our connection to Hashem.

7. What does it mean to “know” that Hashem is here? Imagine a shul that is about to daven Mincha, and a Jew walks in who is the tenth man to complete the *minyan*. This tenth man is a massive Torah scholar, from the greatest rabbis in the generation, but nobody in this particular minyan recognizes who he is.

Yes, the people in the *minyan* “know” that this Jew is there, but since they do not recognize his greatness, they do not really “know” who is there with them.

You can “know” that Hashem is everywhere in a general way, but to truly “know” that Hashem is here is to recognize His absolute Oneness, His greatness, and His goodness.

8. *Ein Od Milvado*, there is nothing other than Hashem, does not mean that nothing else exists, but rather that nothing maintains its own independent existence other than Hashem. All of creation — and all of us — only exist at

If we derive pleasure from things in this world that are outside of our relationship with Hashem, and are not experienced as a form of avodas Hashem,<sup>9</sup> but rather something that has “its own” pleasure, then we will be obtaining enjoyment from something other than Hashem. And to feel that there is pleasure to be experienced outside of the reality of Hashem takes away from the level of *Ein Od Milvado* we are living with, and this damages one’s kedusha.

This is why we should “sanctify ourselves with that which is permitted to us.” By passing on the enjoyments of this world that are not bringing us close to Hashem, as part of the way we serve Him, we are passing on experiences that separate us from Hashem. This helps us internalize more and more that there is nothing in this world outside of Hashem.

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every moment because we are being infused with life by our Creator, and are utterly reliant on His life-support.

9. In the essay on *achilah* / holy eating {Ed. note: Please Hashem, help us write and publish that in English very soon}, we’ll discuss how to enjoy the permitted pleasures of the world in a holy way, and how to incorporate them into a form of serving Hashem.

The main idea is to recognize that the pleasure of anything permitted in this world only exists because of the spark of Godliness that is within that thing, which sustains it and gives it its existence. Through this understanding, we will know that Hashem and only Hashem is the Source of anything good we can experience in this world.

## CHAPTER TWO



### Guarding Our Eyes

#### 1: The Secret to Success

It is well known that guarding our eyes is the key to spiritual success and is the most important and fundamental pathway to attaining holiness.<sup>10</sup>

Only a Yid who merits to sanctify his eyes will merit the pleasure of a deep, spiritual relationship with Hashem, and will attain the ability to experience wondrous revelations in Torah learning. On the other hand, one who is not able to guard his eyes, God forbid, loses his interest and enjoyment in all areas of avodas Hashem.

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10. It is very important for us to watch over our children as well, to preserve their kedusha by making sure not to expose them to forbidden sights, technology, books, and so on. Even if they are very young, these sights have a tremendous effect on their heart and mind and can lead to difficulty in Torah learning later on, God forbid.

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## 2: How to Guard Your Eyes

A Yid must not look at any forbidden sight, whether it is a sight we may encounter on the streets, or as it pertains to separating ourselves completely from the harmful technology that is so common in our generation.

When it comes to avoiding an inappropriate sight on the streets, even though we are required to guard our eyes, we do not need to go to extreme measures to cut ourselves off from the world we live in. Rather, we should guard our kedusha in a measured, careful, and proper way, as follows:

The first step in attaining kedusha is to daven to Hashem and ask Him to help you merit to live a life of holiness. Then, whenever possible, we should choose to use the streets that are the “cleanest,” where we will be less likely to encounter a forbidden sight.<sup>11</sup>

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11. As the Gemara says: “If someone can walk another way, (and he chooses to walk where he may encounter forbidden sights) he is considered wicked, and if there is not a better alternative, it is beyond his control (and he is not at fault)” (*Bava Basra* 57b).

The yetzer hara gives us many excuses while he tries to convince us to go to places where guarding our eyes will be very difficult. The truth is that when we are on the road and travelling, we should be even more careful to guard our eyes properly, because the yetzer hara knows that we are more spiritually vulnerable when we are traveling than when we are in the comfort and security of our own home, and he will try to take advantage of us when we are off guard.

Certainly, if we are on vacation, we must not let our guard down. We must

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**Walk down the street with your heart focused upwards and your eyes focused downwards.**

The proper way to focus your eyes as you walk down the street is to be looking downwards, so that you don't see everything that's going on in the streets. But don't lower your head so much that you can't see where you are going and risk bumping into things or tripping and falling. The main thing is that your eyes don't wander to look at everything there is to see in the streets. This is the key to guarding your eyes — not allowing your eyes to be free to look wherever they want, but rather to be in control of your eyes and to be able to choose what you will look at.

If you are walking in this manner, and nevertheless a forbidden sight enters your line of sight, you have done no wrong whatsoever. The rule is “*ones rachmana patreih* (Bava Kamma 28b), the Torah exempts one who does wrong by no choice of his own. There is no such thing as perfection in *shmiras einayim* (guarding the eyes), where you will never ever see something forbidden, especially in our generation, when forbidden sights are so common on the streets.

The goal is not to seek perfection, but rather to try as best as we can to be in control of what we see, and to take the proper steps to guard our eyes, as we've described above.

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make sure that the time we enjoy when we are away does not, God forbid, become some kind of justification to harm our kedusha or violate any prohibition of the Torah.



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The yetzer hara will try to convince us that kedusha is impossible by taking advantage of times that we saw an inappropriate sight. He'll then tell us: "You messed up"; "You saw something forbidden!" He wants us to feel that if we saw something inappropriate, that means we have failed in *shmiras einayim*, and so we may as well give up because we are a failure.

Don't fall into this dangerous trap! In order to be successful, it is crucial that we feel good about our efforts in avodas Hashem.

This is why you should reiterate to yourself what we've said: If you put in the effort to choose the best street to walk down, and walk with your eyes focused downwards in the proper way, and you still encounter an inappropriate sight, **you have not sinned whatsoever!**

It is not possible that a person will **never** see something; the goal of *shmiras einayim* is to be as careful as possible to guard your eyes, and to thereby demonstrate to Hashem that you are loyal to Him and do not want anything to do with the temptations of the world.

When Hashem sees this, He is pleased and is proud of the real efforts we put into guarding our eyes and attaining holiness.

If, despite our genuine and proper efforts, Hashem orchestrates that we see something we tried to avoid, that does not mean we have done something wrong. There is

a reason Hashem orchestrated such a thing to happen, and we should view that as an invitation to redouble our efforts to think holy thoughts.<sup>12</sup>

You should know that if the thought enters your mind that you “messed up” in kedusha because you saw something unholy despite your proper efforts, that thought was sent to you by your yetzer hara. His goal is to make you think that you are failing in your kedusha, and he is hoping that if he convinces you that you are a failure, you will give up entirely on attaining holiness.

Another strategy of the yetzer hara that we should watch out for is that he tries to get us to be very busy with guarding our eyes, and that this battle should, therefore, constantly be on our mind. When we are walking down the street he wants us to be overthinking it: “Will I see

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12. If you saw something you should not have seen despite your precautions, even though what you saw was by no fault of your own and you have done no wrong, it is good to spend a moment thinking of the name of Hashem so that you can elevate that moment.

If Hashem decided to orchestrate that you see this, that is a sign that there is a holy spark (ניצוץ) that needs to be elevated. You now have an invitation — an opportunity — to attach yourself to Hashem in a stronger way and on a higher level, and this is what is needed to elevate that spark.

Think about the name אדני, and think about the fact that the holy *Shechinah* is the life source and essence of the entire creation, and through that awareness, try to access thoughts and feelings of attachment (*dveikus*) and love toward Hashem.

something I shouldn't? Did I see something I shouldn't? Is there a forbidden sight this way, or that way? Did I mess up?"

We should not fall into this trap, because it will not lead us to a good place. Our job is to position ourselves in the proper way, by focusing our eyes downwards, **and then we should not be busy thinking about *shmiras einayim* at all.**<sup>13</sup>

The best way to occupy our minds is by thinking holy thoughts or speaking holy words. If you are unable to think about spiritual things, think about anything else, even if it's not a spiritual thing. The main thing is not to be overly busy with *shmiras einayim*. Position yourself for success, and that's it!

### 3: Technology

In our generation, there is a terrible new yetzer hara in the form of technology and devices that are the products of the klippah. We should distance ourselves to the nth degree from such things, without compromise.

If we know someone who has fallen into the trap of forbidden technology, we should distance ourselves from his influence, and try to help him out.

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13. It is great to get used to thinking about the Names of Hashem in your mind, or to memorize Mishnayos, or to get used to speaking with Hashem. We should not be busy thinking about whether we saw something inappropriate or not.

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At the very minimum, it is crucial to keep to the guidelines that the leaders of our generation have instituted so that we do not fall into the depths of impurity. Our very souls are at stake!

One should not compromise with the yetzer hara in these matters. The Internet is the gateway to the 50th level of impurity, and our self-control is no match for such a powerful force. The only solution is to run as far away as we can from the risk of being pulled in.

Our ability to avoid forbidden technology is the primary gateway to spiritual success in our generation.

Do not pay any attention to other people's reaction to what you do to avoid this yetzer hara. **Think this through! Will you give up on life itself just because of what someone thinks of you?**<sup>14</sup>

## 4: Being Careful with What We Read

Another way to attain holiness is to avoid reading publications that were written by a *rasha* (wicked person), even those that do not contain content that is forbidden or sinful. When an author writes, the essence of his soul

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14. In this area, you should not give in or compromise in any way, but rather guard yourself with the highest standards that you can, because in this challenge lies klippos that are above our intellectual ability to even grasp, and we must stay as far away as we possibly can.

is infused into his writings, and the reader will connect to and absorb this essence when he reads those writings.<sup>15</sup>

It would be understandable to ask: What is wrong with reading these books? Even if the author is a *rasha*, this particular book is perfectly “kosher”!

The answer is that even though that way of thinking seems reasonable, spiritual matters are beyond logic and reason. We need to trust our *tzaddikim*, who understand the spiritual nature of these things, when they tell us that it is spiritually damaging to read the writings of such people.<sup>16</sup>

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15. This works in the opposite way as well: When we read the holy writings of *tzaddikim*, we connect to and absorb the holy essence of the *tzaddik's* soul. This is why those who have a higher level of spiritual sensitivity will avoid reading books that are written by non-Jews, because they can sense how the essence of a person is transmitted through his writings, and they only want to absorb the holy essence of a *tzaddik's* soul.

16. Another component of kedusha is to avoid being drawn after forms of wisdom and intellectual pathways of non-Jews that are sourced in idolatry (such as spiritual practices from the Far East). This damages our relationship with Hashem.

Someone who pursues these wisdoms can become drawn into them more and more, until he can get to a place where these forms of wisdom are more compelling and valuable in his eyes than the holy Torah, God forbid.

The only source of knowledge we should honor and pursue is our holy Torah, which is the light and wisdom of Hashem Himself!

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## CHAPTER THREE



### Holy Speech, Holy Thoughts

#### 1: Forbidden Speech

When the yetzer hara is not successful in dragging us down through immorality he tries to drag us down through forbidden speech, by tempting us to speak negatively about a Torah scholar, to speak *lashon hara*, to lie, and to use inappropriate language (גיבול פה).

If we are not careful to avoid such speech, all the holiness we have attained will leave us through our mouths. This can cause us to lose our enjoyment of avodas Hashem and to have a harder time experiencing love, awe, and attachment to Hashem, God forbid.

Therefore, we must be careful to avoid speaking words that are not aligned with the will of Hashem, and all the more so, to be extremely vigilant to avoid unholy speech. Unholy speech is a terrible sin, and, even if one is destined for greatness, he can God forbid lose the levels

he's attained through such speech, may Hashem save us from this.

And since Hashem's attribute of goodness is so much stronger than His attribute of judgement, how special and lofty is one who is able to keep his mouth holy and clean! Such a person draws down holiness and connection to Hashem and can merit reward and greatness for generations to come.

## 2: Lashon Hara

*Lashon hara* is among the most difficult forms of forbidden speech to avoid, because when we are talking to people, we may get an urge to speak it and sometimes we can't avoid hearing it.

The first steps we should take is to avoid conversations that are likely to lead to *lashon hara* and to dedicate time to learn *seforim* that teach us proper speech, because doing so gives us the strength to improve in this area. But this is not the end goal; it is just the prerequisite in order to succeed in reaching the highest level of attaining holiness through our mouths.

The ultimate goal is to be aflame with a deep sense of closeness to Hashem, to the point that we want nothing else in the world other than our attachment to Him. Then, listening to conversations that can lead to *lashon hara* will not interest us at all, nor will we want to hear about news stories that are likely to lead to *lashon hara*. And if

we do hear *lashon hara*, we can reject it and not believe it, in accordance with the laws of *lashon hara*.

We also want to always carry with us a mindset of peace, by understanding that there are many different pathways to serving Hashem, and, therefore, there will be people who serve Him differently.<sup>17</sup> With this mindset, we can see the point of goodness within every Jew, in the way he serves Hashem, because we understand that every Jew just wants to serve Hashem in the best possible way.<sup>18</sup>

### 3: Holy Speech

The truth is that it is not only forbidden speech, such as *lashon hara*, that can threaten the kedusha we have attained. Even if speech is permitted, we should be careful to guard what comes out of our mouths, because unnecessary and mindless speech can also affect our holiness.

As we grow in avodas Hashem and refine ourselves more

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17. A “mindset of peace” (דַּעַת שְׁלֵוִים) means that we know and anticipate that we will see and hear about other Jews serving Hashem differently than we do. But we know that Hashem cherishes many different ways of serving Him, as our Sages teach us (*Midrash Rabbah* 13:16) that there are “70 facets to the Torah.” Carrying around this mindset will help us love our fellow Jew, making it easier to avoid listening to *lashon hara* and to easily reject it if we do hear it.

18. See more about this in B’yam Darkecha, Ahavas Yisroel / Loving Our Fellow Jew.



and more, even if the yetzer hara has a hard time getting us to speak forbidden speech, he may try to trap us with unnecessary speech.

You may find that after you have a special spiritual experience, such as a really good davening, all of a sudden, you have the opportunity and urge for unnecessary conversations. This is how the yetzer hara tries to trap us to take away the higher levels we've achieved.

The best way to sanctify ourselves through our speech is to minimize talking when it is not needed. As Chazal teach us (*Avos* 3:13): סִיג לַחֲכָמָה שְׁתִּיקָה, “A fence to wisdom is silence.” When we do need to speak, we should be careful to think before we talk, and only say things that are proper and necessary.<sup>19</sup>

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19. It is common for someone to have something to say and feel that he “must” say it right now, otherwise he will lose the opportunity to say it, or forget what he wanted to say. This can bring an urge to say it immediately, even if that requires cutting off your friend while he is talking or saying something that does not even connect to the conversation you are having.

In such a situation, remember: There is not a single thing in this world that is dependent on whether you speak or not. Hashem runs the world and carefully orchestrates His will through many different messengers, with each message being delivered by the right person at the right time.

If the right thing for you to do is to say something, then your job is to say it, but the outcome is not dependent on whether you say it right now or not. Hashem will orchestrate the outcome He desires whether you say it or not. If He wants something to happen, it will happen even if you do not do your part, and if He does not want it to happen, it will not happen even if you do your part.

One level of this is simply being careful to only speak if what you will say is true, proper, and needed. But there is a deeper opportunity here as well, and that is to speak with *dveikus* (a strong sense of attachment to Hashem).

Speaking with *dveikus* means to think before<sup>20</sup> you speak that the power of speech comes from Hashem, and that when you open your mouth, it is as if the Divine Presence is speaking through your throat. You are nothing more than a vessel and a “speaker” through which the will of Hashem comes out.

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Therefore, our role is to do our part in a measured way, without pressure or stress. There is no need to rush to say something “right now or it will be too late!” because if Hashem wants it to happen, and He wants you to be the messenger to deliver a certain message, you will be given the opportunity to say what needs to be said at the right time and in the right way.

Trust in Hashem that if something needs to be said, it will ultimately be said in the best possible way, and if you end up losing the opportunity or forget to say it, that is a clear sign that the will of Hashem was not for you to say it.

The main thing is to live with *yishuv hadaas* (a mindset of peace and tranquility), with faith and trust in Hashem.

Many times, when you feel a pressure that you must say something immediately, you would be far better off resisting that urgency and waiting before you say it. If you do say it, you may end up seeing for yourself that it was a mistake to speak right away, or that what you rushed to say was not necessary in the end.

20. As you get used to this, you can learn to think this way while you are speaking as well.

From where does man get his ability to speak? Our power of speech is not our own; we cannot say even a single word unless Hashem gives us the ability to both formulate an idea in our mind and then articulate it through our mouth.

When we realize that we are a vessel and a pipeline through which the will of Hashem is revealed, we can sanctify ourselves through our speech in a wondrous way.<sup>21</sup>

However, if you are working on this mindset of speaking with holiness (*kedushas hadibbur*), be careful to do so in a measured way, and not to be broken every time you make a mistake in your speech. It is very common to find things you feel you did not need to say, and it's important not to be pained and broken every time that happens.

Every single thing that happens in the world is from Hashem and is intentionally orchestrated in the best possible way to bring out the will of Hashem; there is nothing to be broken about.

Our job is to do our part in fulfilling our mission in this world. Part of this is to be careful with what we say. Another part of this is that if we do accidentally say

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21. You can take this a step further: Besides reminding yourself that your ability to speak even a single word is a gift from Hashem, take a moment to contemplate how with every breath you take, you are drawing life from Hashem Himself. This is a very powerful exercise to do as you are walking or traveling, and can really bring you close to Hashem.

something damaging, we try to fix the damage, so if we say something that is forbidden, we should do *teshuvah*.

But as long as we are doing our part, we must believe that with Hashem's endless compassion, He accepts our *teshuvah*. And we should remember that at the end of the day, we have no reason to be broken because everything will always work out for the best, in exactly the way that Hashem intended all along.

#### 4: Holy Thoughts

Another important pathway to attaining holiness is guarding our thoughts — to do everything we can to avoid thinking about unholy things, as the Torah says (*Bamidbar* 15:39): **וְלֹא תִתּוּרֵי אַחֲרֵי לִבְבְּכֶם**, *Do not stray after your hearts*.

It is important to learn the proper way to battle unholy thoughts. The first principle is: Do not allow unholy thoughts to sit in your mind and circulate. The quicker you can get rid of them, the easier it is to attach yourself back to Hashem with holy thoughts.

But the way to get rid of those unholy thoughts is not by trying to get rid of them. That never works! Do not give them any attention, as the more you think about them, the harder it will be to get rid of them.

Do not try to think about why such thoughts entered your mind, do not try to think of “opposing thoughts” to try to counteract them, because this only strengthens them.

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And do not try to just force the thoughts out of your mind, because that is impossible.

The more we think about the thoughts themselves, in any way whatsoever, the harder it is to banish them from our minds.

The proper way to get rid of unholy thoughts is that the moment you become aware of them, think about something else entirely that will occupy your mind. It is impossible for a person to think two different thoughts at the same moment, so if you can successfully fill your mind with another thought, then the first, unholy thought, will disappear.

The best way to fill your mind is by reading words of Torah for an extended period of time (*retzifus*), with a fiery passion and with proper comprehension, so that your mind is filled with holy thoughts of Torah.

Another way to burn away the unholy thoughts and purify your mind is to think about and envision the name of Hashem.

If you are not able to fill your mind with holy thoughts, for this purpose, it is also sufficient to think about any other topic — even if it is not connected to spirituality at all.<sup>22</sup> The main thing is to fill your mind with something

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22. In the section on *middos*, we will explain which good thoughts are the best ones to think about in order to counteract specific unholy thoughts. For example, in the spiritual world, the opposite thought of “temptation”

that is entirely unrelated to the unholy thought, without trying to force the unholy thought out.

Do not think that because an unholy thought entered your mind, that means you are a bad person or a sinner. If a thought comes into your mind, and you immediately do what you can to fill your mind with something else, you have done nothing wrong. You are not at fault or “guilty” of anything. On the contrary, by pushing yourself to fill your mind with something else right away, you are bringing Hashem tremendous pleasure, and bringing a great *tikkun*.<sup>23</sup>

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is thoughts of loving Hashem. Each form of a bad *middah* has an opposing good *middah*, and thinking about its corresponding holy thought can be the best antidote to use to get rid of the unholy one.

23. Many people are pained by the fact that such thoughts entered their mind at all. It's important to emphasize that it brings Hashem tremendous pleasure to see a Yid battling this yetzer hara and purifying his mind! A “simple” Jew who works to sanctify his mind can bring pleasure to Hashem in a way that even great *tzaddikim* cannot do.

It is forbidden to be pained or to think less of yourself for having these thoughts! This does not mean you are not a good Jew, and you do not have to be busy asking yourself why these thoughts came to you.

When you battle with unholy thoughts, you are fighting the war of Hashem, and bringing Him tremendous pride in your efforts! Keep fighting these battles, and you will see that it will get easier over time, and you will achieve lofty levels of holiness. Do not despair!

## 5: Philosophy

There are certain philosophical ideas that the yetzer hara tries to latch onto our minds to corrupt our *emunah* and understanding of Yiddishkeit (*Hashkafah*). This is more likely to happen to those whose minds are already busy with unholy thoughts or actions, where the klippos have a level of control over them, God forbid. Such people are at a higher risk of falling into the trap of philosophy that corrupts the mind and soul.

Matters of faith are not an intellectual study. They cannot be fully understood by the limited intellect of a human being, but they can be experienced in the purest and loftiest way by the Jewish soul. Someone that the klippos have control over (because of his actions), who feels a need to understand everything about Judaism through the small and limited human mind, is at great risk of being led by the klippos to an ever worse spiritual place.

The solution to this is to avoid engaging in philosophy entirely, and to enter a state of simple and pure *emunah*, putting faith in Hashem before and above intellectual understanding.

Someone who struggles with this should say to himself: "Hashem is so great, and I am but a small human being. What power do I have to understand the mysterious ways of God? I would be better off relying on Him, just like my ancestors did throughout all the generations."



## CHAPTER FOUR



### Mikveh

#### 1: The Power of Mikveh

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Hashem gave us a tremendous and valuable tool to use to purify ourselves and attain holiness — the *mikveh*.

The Torah says that immersing in a *mikveh* purifies the impure. This means that a person rids himself from the grasp of the klippas and becomes pure by going to the *mikveh*.

The *tzaddikim* explain that not only does going to the *mikveh* rid us of *tumah* (impurity), it also purifies and refines our body and soul from all sorts of klippas, temptations, forbidden sights, and forces of evil, which are all forms of *tumah*. And beyond that, it brings onto us a spirit of purity and renewal in our avodas Hashem.<sup>24</sup>

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24. This is clear from the Arizal (*Shaar HaKavanos, Derushei Shabbos*, 1), who says that on Erev Shabbos, one must immerse in the *mikveh* two times, one after the other. The first is to remove the “weekday clothes” of our soul, and the



We, who love Hashem and just want to serve Him properly, so deeply want to free ourselves from the temptations and impurities that pull us away from Him. And the Torah is revealing to us that there is a powerful tool that we can use to break away from the klippos and attain holiness! Therefore, it is very worthwhile for us to pay attention to what this tool is, and utilize it effectively.<sup>25</sup>

This is why the *tzaddikim* throughout the generations taught us to always be careful to go to the *mikveh* every single day, to utilize this great tool to purify and detach ourselves from any kind of impurity we may have encountered throughout the day.

Before Shacharis is a particularly good time to go to the *mikveh* because, besides the regular benefits of immersion, it will help you start your day with a sense of renewal and serve as a *hachanah* (spiritual preparation) for Shacharis.

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second is to accept upon ourselves the additional holiness of Shabbos Kodesh.

It is clear from this that the *mikveh* does not only have the power to remove impurity, but also has the ability to give us additional holiness.

25. Although some halachic authorities say that one who becomes impure is not halachically **required** to go to the *mikveh*, everyone agrees that it is a very good idea and worthwhile thing to do. Undoubtedly, the quality of our davening and Torah learning is incomparably higher after going to the *mikveh*!

**With this simple and easy action of going to the mikveh, you can elevate yourself, your davening, and your learning in a wondrous way!**

## 2: The Proper Way to Immerse

Some people use the *mikveh* but walk out without feeling any sort of spiritual purity, and do not feel that they just did anything. What can be done about this?

First of all, there is a very important principle in all of avodas Hashem, which is that **the greatness we attain from doing a mitzvah is achieved whether we feel it or not**. Even if we do not feel any *ohr* (spiritual light), we do receive it, and this is just a test of our *emunah*, whether we believe in the value of what we are doing even though we do not feel anything.

Secondly, as it pertains to *mikveh*, there are some important guidelines that we should follow to maximize what we gain from going to the *mikveh*. How we follow these guidelines can make a big difference in what we will gain — and what we will feel — from going to the *mikveh*.

We must be very careful to act with kedusha in the *mikveh*, especially as it pertains to guarding our eyes. One who is not careful about what he looks at in the *mikveh* will not only not receive the holiness he is looking for by immersing, but on the contrary, he can leave the *mikveh* more impure than he was when he came in, God forbid.

Here are some basic guidelines to follow in the *mikveh*:

- 1) **Be very careful to act with tzniyus** (modesty) in the *mikveh* (as the Mishna Berurah rules in *Siman* 2, s"v k1, that a person should not be undressed longer than necessary).

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- 2) **The key to success in this area is to be quick,**<sup>26</sup> and not to take your time. By acting quickly in order to maintain the proper holiness, we can merit that the *mikveh* will purify us effectively.
- 3) **Guard your eyes.** It is forbidden to look at the place of the *bris*, whether it is your own or someone else's. Even seeing someone undressed (in other areas) is not good for us. It is important to position yourself with your eyes focused downwards, just like you would when walking down the street, as described earlier.<sup>27</sup>
- 4) **Try to go to the mikveh when it isn't busy.** This is particularly important before Shabbos and Yom Tov. Do not wait until the last minute, when the *mikveh* is usually very crowded.
- 5) **Do not talk in the mikveh,** unless it is truly necessary.

### 3: Mikveh: Returning to Your Essence

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The more we can understand and feel what the *mikveh*

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26. If one is in an empty *mikveh* where there is no *tzniyus* issue of having other people around) and wants to spend more time davening in the water (see section 4: Underwater Prayers), that is fine.

27. If you tried to guard your eyes but you saw anyway, that is fine. The Torah was not given to angels, and our job is to do our part. If you did your part and saw anyway, **do not worry about it at all**; you will not be negatively affected by this.

is and what it does to us, the more we will gain from the experience.

Even though anything we do in Torah and mitzvos “works” even if we do not understand it, the *sefarim* teach us that by understanding it, having intention for it, feeling it,<sup>28</sup> and yearning for it, we can accomplish much more when we do it.

The essence of *mikveh* is that when one immerses in it, it is as if he is being born again and given the opportunity for a new and fresh start.<sup>29</sup>

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28. Even though the benefit of the mitzvah is not at all dependent on whether we feel it or not, our job is to try to feel it as best as we can, so that the light we receive is strengthened and internalized.

It’s just that there are two ways this can happen. If we merit to feel it, that means we received the light as an *ohr pnimi*, an internal light, and then we can strengthen the experience through these feelings. If we do not feel anything, then we have received the light as an *ohr makif*, a surrounding light, and then instead of feeling the light, we *yearn* to feel the light.

Either way, one should be happy with whatever level Hashem gives him!

29. While immersing, there are some intentions we can have to help us strengthen and internalize this sense of renewal: Think about how the top of the *mikveh* represents the Name of Hashem אהי"ה, the four sides represent the four letters of the Name הוי"ה, and the bottom represents the Name אדני"ה.

The reason for this is because the Name אהי"ה represents thoughts, the Name הוי"ה represents feelings, and the name אדני"ה represents actions. Our intention when going to the *mikveh* should be to correct our thoughts, feelings, and actions, and commit that from now on, these will all be aligned with the will

In a sense, when one immerses underwater, it is as if he has left the world, since it is impossible to breathe or live underwater. After the state of being in a place where life is impossible, when he emerges, it is as if he was given a new lease on life.

In a deeper sense, when a Yid goes under the surface of the water, he is nullifying himself completely, and by doing that, he disconnects from the falseness of the klippos and purifies himself. This is because the main way to be free of the klippos is to escape our *yeishus* (ego), and this happens when we nullify ourselves in the *mikveh*.

#### 4: Underwater Prayers

The very act of going to the *mikveh* brings purity and kedusha, even if you do not “feel anything” or have any special intentions.

However, if you are feeling up to it, when you are under the water you can daven from your heart, silently crying out to Hashem. **The tefillah of a Yid from the depth of his heart under the waters of the mikveh is exceedingly precious to Hashem!**

This is why a Yid should go to the *mikveh* every day.<sup>30</sup> Go

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of Hashem, with a sense of attachment to Him.

30. For those who are able to, going to the *mikveh* every single day is a powerful way to utilize the great gift of *mikveh* and the additional holiness it brings. But even if one cannot do that, it is a very good practice to at least go

beneath the surface of the water and pour your heart out to Hashem, and recognize the great value of this form of tefillah. Through this, you can go from a place of distance and smallness to a place of closeness and greatness, and leave the *mikveh* with a sense of renewal as if you were just born again.

Every Yid, on his own level, should try to purify himself as much as he can, on a consistent basis. Certainly, if God forbid one becomes *tamei*, he should immediately run to the *mikveh*, go into the water, and cry out to Hashem from the depth of his heart.



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every Erev Shabbos, as Arizal teaches (see footnote 24). At the very minimum, one should be vigilant to go to the *mikveh* if he becomes *tamei*, G-d forbid.

## GLOSSARY OF HEBREW WORDS AND PHRASES



Only terms that are not immediately translated in the book are listed here.

*Arizal* — Rabbi Yitzchak Luria; the great Kabbalist known as the Holy Ari

*Aveirah / Aveiros* — sin / sins (plural)

*Avodah* — service, spiritual work (lit. “work”)

*Avodah Zarah* — idolatry

*Avodas Hashem* — serving Hashem

*Avraham Avinu* — our forefather Abraham

*Baal Teshuvah* — one who returns to Hashem; a penitent

*Bitachon* — trust in Hashem

*Bris* — covenant; a binding spiritual bond with Hashem

*Bris Milah* — circumcision

*B'yam Darkecha* — name of this book; lit. “In the sea of Your way”

*Chazal* — the Sages of the Talmudic era

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*Cheilek Elokaḥ Mimaal Mamish* — a part of Hashem Himself; the essence of the Jewish soul

*Chessed* — acts of kindness

*Daven / Davening* — pray / praying

*Dovid Hamelech* — King David

*Dveikus* — a sense of attachment to Hashem

*Ein Od Milvado* — there is nothing other than Hashem

*Emunah* — faith in Hashem; our relationship with Hashem

*Erev Shabbos* — Friday (lit. “the eve of Shabbos”)

*Eretz Yisroel* — the Land of Israel

*Fasting* — abstaining from food as a form of spiritual rectification or discipline

*Gashmiyus* — physicality; material existence and pleasure

*Gemara* — the Talmud; foundational rabbinic text explaining the Mishnah

*Hachanah* — spiritual preparation

*Halachah / Halachic* — Jewish law; pertaining to Jewish legal rulings

*Hashem* — God

*Hishtadlus* — doing our part; physical effort

*Kashrus* — the laws of kosher food

*Kedusha* — holiness



*Klippos* — evil forces that serve as a barrier between us and Hashem

*Kohanim* — priests; descendants of Aharon

*Lashon Hara* — forbidden negative speech about others, even if true

*Lishmah* — for its own sake; done purely for Hashem

*Middah / Middos* — character trait(s); spiritual attributes

*Mikveh* — ritual immersion pool for spiritual purification

*Minchah* — afternoon prayer service

*Minyan* — quorum of ten Jewish men required for certain prayers

*Mishnah Berurah* — authoritative halachic work by Rabbi Yisrael Meir ha-Kohen Kagan (the Chofetz Chaim)

*Mishnayos* — sections of the Mishnah (plural of Mishnah)

*Mitzrayim* — Egypt

*Mitzvah / Mitzvos* — commandment(s) of the Torah

*Nekudos* — vowel points; the diacritical marks (vowel symbols) placed on Hebrew letters.

*Neshama* — Jewish soul

*Ohr* — spiritual light

*Ohr Makif* — surrounding spiritual light not yet internalized

*Ohr Pnimi* — internalized spiritual light

*Orlah* — foreskin

*P'gam Habris* — damage to the bris; blemish of the covenant

*Parnassah* — livelihood; sustenance

*Parshah / Parshiyos* — Torah portion / Torah portions (plural)

*Sefer / Sefarim* — holy book / holy books (plural)

*Shechinah* — Divine Presence

*Shabbos* — the Sabbath

*Shabbos Kodesh* — the holy Sabbath

*Shacharis* — morning prayer service

*Shelah* — Rabbi Yeshayah Horowitz; author of the Shelah Hakadosh

*Shlomo Hamelech* — King Solomon

*Shmirah* — guarding; protection

*Shmiras Einayim* — guarding one's eyes from forbidden sights

*Shmiras Habris* — guarding the covenant

*Shulchan Aruch* — the “Set Table”; classic code of Jewish law

*Taanis Dibbur* — fast of speech; refraining from unnecessary talking

*Taavah / Taavos* — desire(s); physical temptation(s)

*Tahara* — purity

*Tamei* — spiritually impure

*Tefilla* — prayer

*Tehillim* — Psalms

*Teshuvah* — returning to Hashem

*Tikkun* — spiritual rectification

*Tikkun Habris* — rectification of the covenant

*Torah* — the Divine teaching; Written and Oral Law

*Tumah* — spiritual impurity

*Tzaddik / Tzaddikim* — righteous person / righteous people (plural)

*Tzniyus* — modesty

*Yeishus* — ego; self-centeredness

*Yetzer Hara* — evil inclination

*Yetzer Tov* — good inclination

*Yid / Yidden* — Jew / Jews

*Yiddishkeit* — Judaism; Jewish way of life

*Yishuv Hadaas* — inner calm; settled mind

*Yom Tov* — Jewish holiday

*Zohar* — foundational work of Kabbalah

*Zohar Hakadosh* — the holy Zohar



