**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**The Path of the Piaseczner Rebbe**

**By Dr. Ron Wacks**

**Shiur #26: Chassidic Service of God (continued)**

**Ways of Achieving *Hitragshut* (continued)**

**Using Thought**

In order to arouse the psyche to a state of *hitragshut* and *hitlahavut*, a person must use his power of thought and focus on emotion, for which thought serves as a base or platform. Emotion requires a habitat in which to grow, so that the psyche can reveal itself. This is the “platform” to which R. Kalonymus refers:

And what is the platform for the activation of the psyche? Intense thought is the beginning of the platform upon which [the psyche] will become manifest, endure, and gain the strength to become further activated.[[1]](#footnote-1)

We can understand this by examining at an everyday example. If a person wrongs his friend but the friend devotes little attention to the offense because he is occupied with other things, his anger will gradually subside. If, on the other hand, he spends all his time thinking about what happened, how much money he lost, etc., this thinking will activate his emotions, leading him to a state of great anger. Even after his anger does finally subside, if at some later stage he thinks back on the episode and once again focuses on the extent of the wrong, the damages he suffered, etc., his anger will rise up again, just as it did previously. We see that it is thought that arouses emotion and allows it to grow and develop. This applies not only to negative emotion, as in this example, but also positive emotion.

Enlisting one’s thinking in this way is not “intellectual” activity. One simply has to think about what he is doing when performing *mitzvot*. It is preferable to choose *mitzvot* that are occasional and involve a separate timeframe, such as Shabbat or festivals, rather than prayer, which is very frequent. When Shabbat arrives, one thinks about the meaning of Shabbat starting, how Shabbat affects his personal and family life, his immersion in the *mikveh*, his walk to shul, his eating at the Shabbat table, etc.:

Therefore, if you wish to expose and strengthen the positive movements of the psyche, you must provide them with a platform. Strengthen your holy thought so that you will think about the holiness of the matter that has excited your psyche – not in an intellectual, analytical way, but rather simple, general thinking…

It is better to start with a *mitzva* that involves changes in different parameters, such as Shabbat, which involves a change in time (occurring just one day a week), and in your clothing and that of all your family and friends, and in that the whole house looks different. And especially the festivals, and Pesach, for then it is easier for you to strengthen and broaden your thinking.

After you discover intense thinking through *mitzvot* such as these, you will be able to exercise thinking that activates your psyche even in relation to the regular, day-to-day *mitzvot*.[[2]](#footnote-2)

After using his thinking in this way, a person can become more aware of the emotions that are aroused within him when he performs *mitzvot*, and he can then strengthen them to the point that he feels them with his whole body and all his consciousness. Even when a person is not in a state of *hitragshut*, he can recall previous experiences of *hitragshut* and arouse them anew. For instance, he might recall his participation in a joyous occasion surrounding a *mitzva*, the *ne’ila* prayer on Yom Kippur, etc.

**Intense Thought and Imagination**

R. Kalonymus states that intense thought should make use of “images” –products of the imagination: “There can be no intense thought without its images.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

The power of intense thought is broadened when we augment it with pictures in our minds. To illustrate: If a person wants to think about a close friend who is far away and to focus on his love for this friend, there can be no question that it is easier to do so if he looks at a photograph of him or, alternatively, conjures up a picture of him in his mind. The more detailed the picture, the more firmly the image stands in his mind, and then his thinking can also be more powerful and the emotions can be awakened. In a similar way, R. Kalonymus instructs the reader to use the power of his imagination in order to arouse *hitragshut* and *hitlahavut* in his service of God.

Since R. Kalonymus devotes extensive discussion to the subject of imagination, we will have a separate discussion to this topic. Part of the discussion there continues this focus on the augmenting of *hitragshut* and *hitlahavut* by means of the imagination.

**Methods for the Study of Torah, *Aggada*, and *Kabbala***

The use of intense thinking and imagination should also be applied to certain areas of Torah study. No change should be made to the Talmudic-halakhic realm of study, but when it comes to *Tanakh*, the student must imagine the events that are recorded and feel himself completely a part of them. This is the way in which one should read the stories of the forefathers, the experience of *Am Yisrael* in Egypt, or any other biblical narrative. The exegesis of *Chazal* in the *midrash* and Zohar should be used to bring the biblical characters and their actions to life, so that the reader feels himself actually experiencing the events, rather than reading them in a detached way.[[4]](#footnote-4) (A section of our future discussion on “imagination” is devoted to this subject.)

**Alcohol**

Drinking alcohol is also effective in arousing emotions and is another way of causing the psyche to reveal itself: “The drinking of alcohol, practiced by *chasidim*, has great importance;” “alcohol awakens a person’s heart.”[[5]](#footnote-5) *Chasidut* has always enlisted external aids to activate the psyche in the service of God.[[6]](#footnote-6)

If the *chasid* is a refined individual who drinks in limited quantities and includes his fellow *chasidim* in the experience, then the alcohol can bring great benefits. The precondition for a positive influence is that the drinking be for the sake of Divine service:

A *chasid* who is refined and is intensively seeking to reestablish contact with his inner self says, “I was awakened by nothing more than a drink, and through that a little of my psyche has now revealed itself…”

You should do the same: Drink with fellow chasidism who are refined, to this end and in this manner, so as to bring about *hitragshut* and increased Divine service with a revealed psyche. And since it is with this purpose and with this preparation and at a chasidic gathering that you undertake this awakening and drink, therefore the otherwise ordinary stimulation that you will feel assumes, from the very outset, holy form; it will be *hitragshut* in Divine service, for the sake of faith, fear, and love of God.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Further instruction in this regard is provided for the members of the *Bnei Machshava Tova* fellowship. Here, even someone who has trouble drinking is encouraged to make an effort:

It is a good custom to drink together from time to time – but not simply to be drunk and pass the time, God forbid. The *chasidim* use this method to bond the group. Drinking also loosens and rouses the animal nature, which adds passion and vigor to our efforts. If ill health prevents you from drinking, God forbid, you can water down your beverage and join in anyway.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Drinking should be treated as a process that prepares one for revelation of the psyche and which is to be followed by singing, dancing, and study together. In our next *shiur*,we will examine in closer detail the next two stages: music and dancing.

(To be continued)

Translated by Kaeren Fish

1. *Hakhsharat Ha-Avrekhim*, p. 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid. p. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. p. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid. pp. 79-89. In these pages, R. Kalonymus demonstrates how the story of *Am Yisrael* in Egypt can be relived. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Hakhsharat Ha-Avrehim*, p. 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. According to the Ba’al Shem Tov, drinking neutralizes bodily desires, thereby freeing a person for spiritual activity, as illustrated in his famous parable: “This might be compared to a king whose only son was taken into the harshest captivity. Much time passed, and the hopes of redeeming him and restoring him to his father receded. After many years, he received a letter from his father, the king, urging him not to give up hope and not to forget his royal dignity among the surrounding savages, for there was still hope that he would be restored to his father by means of different processes, whether by war or in peace, etc. Immediately the king’s son was filled with a great joy, but this was a secret letter, and he could not show his joy openly. So he went along with the people of his town to the tavern, where they drank wine and other alcohol, and there they were physically happy from the wine, while he rejoiced over his father’s letter. Now, in a similar way, the commandment of enjoying the Shabbat is performed through the body, which is physical, by means of eating and drinking, so that the *tzaddik* is able to partake of the other type of joy – the rejoicing of the soul in cleaving to the blessed God the entire day” (*Toldot Yaakov Yosef*, *Parashat* *Kedoshim*, 1). In contrast to the Ba’al Shem Tov, R. Nachman emphasizes the broadening of the mind and thinking that comes with alcohol: “One must keep far removed from inebriation and to take care not to drink more than he is able to in order not to become inebriated, for a small amount, as needed, is beneficial for expanding one’s mind…“ (*Likkutei Moharan*, *Tinyana* 26). For more on drinking as a *tikkun* and the salutation “*le-chaim*,” see A. Wertheim, *Halakhot Ve-Halikhot Be-Chasidut* (Jerusalem, 5749), pp. 221-225. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Hakhsharat Ha-Avrekhim*, pp. 112-113. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Bnei Machshava Tova*, p. 56 [*Conscious Community*: *A Guide to Inner Work*, transl. and with an introduction by Andrea Cohen-Kiener (Jason Aronson, 1996), p. 95]. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)