

BILVAVI

GETTING TO
KNOW YOUR
SHARE

005

STAYING
ANCHORED
TO SERENITY

BILVAVI MISHKAN EVNEH
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Back & Forth Between Serenity & Fast-Paced Life

It has so far been explained in the previous lesson with *siyata d'shmaya* the ways of quieting, how the power of inner quiet gives the person the power to recognize the inner world, and in particular, the soul.

The more a person is connected to a place of quiet in his soul, his lifestyle also becomes calmer, as a result. He will find that it has become more natural for him to protect his serenity and not to do things that will take him out of his serenity.

A person is not always to be in the quiet. He is involved in a world of action, of turbulence in his various actions, feelings, and thoughts. These are all movements in the soul, which all create a noise for the soul. Whatever a person does, even his wishes and his pleasure, are movements of the soul. Any movement of the soul will always take a person out of his calmness, depending on the intensity of the movement. A person has to be involved with the practical side of life, which will take him out his calmness. But how much will it remove him from his calmness? It depends on how much calmness he has already acquired. The calmer he is becoming, the less his involvement with the world will remove him from that calmness.

The inner way of living is to go “back and forth” between the modes of quiet and movement. A person has to mainly live in the quiet space in his soul, and he needs to be involved with the world when he needs to, but immediately after taking care of his responsibilities, he should return to a quiet space in his soul [to his state of serenity].¹

“A Torah scholar’s work is done by others” and a Torah scholar is called Shabbos, to show that an internal kind of person lives in a state of “Shabbos”, serenity. The inner way of life is a serene, Shabbos-like state. A person has to leave his serenity to go and do things, and then return to his serenity. One has to do what he needs to do, but he has to return to his serenity.

Where To Draw The Line

How does a person draw the line of what he should or shouldn't be doing? He must do whatever he is obligated to do according to *halachah*, even if it compromises on his serenity. But if something is not an

¹ After the *derasha*, the Rav was asked, “What exactly is the serenity that a person needs to be returning to?” The Rav answered, “Every person has a serenity on the level that he is on. There is no one level of serenity for everyone. One’s serenity depends the level he is on, on whatever calms him. A higher level is when a person can become totally divested from the world, but this is a high level. Each person at the level he is on is able to return to his state of serenity at his current level....Some people become serene from thinking certain thoughts, others become serene from saying *Tehillim*, others become serene by learning Torah quietly, and others become serene by learning Torah mentally. In any case, this is the person’s serenity.”

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obligation, he should not do it if it will take away his serenity. He should only do it if he can stay serene or if he can easily return to his serenity.

For example, one may interrupt his learning to do a mitzvah that cannot be done by others. This is because Torah is for acting upon it. The Rambam says however that one must then return to his learning afterwards. Thus, the Rambam implies that if one cannot return to his learning afterwards, he should not do the mitzvah even if it cannot be done by others. If it will uproot him from his learning, he should not do it.

Another example is that there are many things which are *Chassidus* (non-obligatory acts of piety) and which are cited by the *Poskim*. There are so many things which a person does or doesn't have to do. How can a person know what he should be doing and where to draw the line? It is a matter that depends on one's personal level and soul-root. A person can only take on matters if he's at the level of doing it and if it's connected with his soul-root. But even when something meets this criteria, a person should still not do it if doing so will uproot him from his serenity. A person cannot keep every *chumra* (halachic stringency) he hears about it. Only if one can remain deeply connected to his inner world as he takes on non-obligatory matters, should he do them. Otherwise, he should not do it, if he lose his serenity in the process.

Even when it comes to the mitzvah of honoring parents, there are cases where one is not always obligated – when honoring them is causing him to lose his serenity. If there is a case where parents are making too many demands, or if their minds are not well, how far one must go to honor his parents? As long as it doesn't uproot his serenity, one is obligated to leave his country in order to go the country where his parents love, to honor them. But if going to another country in order to honor them will uproot his serenity, he is not obligated to honor them. In such a case, the Rambam says that he should hire someone else to take care of them.

This is also a fundamental for life as well. If we are obligated in *halachah* to do a certain thing, then we must do it regardless. But if we want to do anything that we aren't obligated in, we can only do it if it won't uproot us from our inner world. This is not a rule that applies to people on a high level. It applies to everyone, regardless of what their level is.

There are those who don't have any self-awareness of what their limitations are – they don't know what takes them out of their serenity. So what happens? They get involved in all kinds of good things like doing *chessed* projects or raising money for a wedding, etc., and then suddenly they realize that they are not calm, and that suddenly they cannot concentrate on their learning and can't be focused. One has to

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act according to the level he is on, and he should only do things that won't uproot him from his inner world – from his state of serenity.

That leads us to what we are saying here – the concept of staying serene. Anything we do will take us out of serenity, but only if we can easily return to serenity afterwards should we do something (unless it's an obligation). That is the rule for our inner world of how much we need to do and how much we don't need to do.

False Serenity

Understandably, there are those who don't know what true serenity is, and they think that serenity means laziness and sleepiness. Two people can go to sleep on Shabbos, and one of them is doing it out of true serenity while another person is sleeping simply because he's lazy (which is only imaginary serenity). Here we are speaking about one who guards his inner world. The clearer a person is living with the depth of his soul, the more clearly he will be in touch with his serenity. At the same time, he will also make sure to counter the tendency towards laziness, by doing small acts of going against his will, so that he doesn't become lazy.

The Barometer Of How Much We Should Or Shouldn't Be Doing

Our soul wants to do many good things and grab as much mitzvos as we can (as Chazal said, "Grab and eat", which is referring to grabbing *mitzvos*), and cram in as much Torah learning as possible, to do as much as we can, to do *chessed* and to help others whenever we can, and to daven with our heart, etc. How much do we need to be doing all of this? What is the barometer by how we can measure when to do or not do something? The barometer is: Only if we can remain calm and serene with all of it.

For a more external kind of person who isn't yet in touch with his inner world, the barometer of how much to do versus how much not to do should be measured by discerning if he can return afterwards to his normal routine or not. For a more inner kind of person, the barometer is if he can return to his serenity afterwards or not.

When it comes to learning Torah, there is no amount of how much to learn, one must learn "day and night", but a person also needs his sleep. (The Rambam says to sleep 8 hours.) Part of relaxing the body is to calm the soul. One of the 48 ways of acquiring the Torah is to lessen speech, and the Gra says that one should make sure to talk a little bit with others every day, to stay minimally calm. One cannot learn Torah properly unless he is taking care of his basic needs to stay serene. He needs sleep and he needs to talk a little bit with others every day.

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A young, idealistic yeshiva bochur may want to finish Shas, stay up all night learning, and writing his chiddushim on the sugya, but he may become anxious and chaotic about this, staying up all night and losing sleep, and harming himself in the process. A person should learn Torah to the extent that he maintains his serenity and peace of mind. If pushing himself to learn Torah more will take him out of his serenity, he is not obligated – and he should not - learn Torah to this extent.

Certainly this is a delicate concept, and there are those who are in any case anxious, whether they are learning a lot of Torah or not. A person should not *chas v'shalom* waste his time for learning Torah. We are speaking here of someone who has already reached some basic level of peace of mind, so for him, he has to make sure that his time (and approach towards) Torah learning isn't compromising on his serenity.

Times of Turbulence and Times of Serenity

Sometimes the responsibilities of life can forcibly take a person out of his calmness and makes him disconnected from his inner world, and he does not have a choice in the matter. But later, he must make sure to return to serenity when he's able to.

Every person has times when he can't be relaxed. Every person has calmer times and times that are more turbulent, relatively speaking. As the *Mesillas Yeshtarim* teaches, no one has a completely serene life, because there are all kinds of responsibilities, such as earning livelihood, taking care of the family, health, and various worries and concerns that can come up. These things will inevitably take a person out of his serenity, but a person has to learn how to stay somewhat serene even amidst the turbulence of life, so that he can deal with these situations better and not become totally uprooted from his inner world. Therefore, when one has quiet time, that is the time for him to enter a quiet space in himself and developing this space of inner serenity more and more. Then he will be able to stay more serene even amidst situations that are not calm.

Serenity - Living In A Space Outside Of The Physical World

Shabbos is the time for serenity, it is when the world became serene, it is beyond the world of six days, it is the world of serenity. It is a day that is outside of This World. When we are serene, we are outside of the world. If we are mainly living in our state of serenity, then we are really living outside of this world, and entering it and exiting it when we need to. The Baal Shem Tov said that a *ben aliyah* (truly growing person) is who lives in the *aliyah*, above in the attic - and sometimes coming down to take care of what he needs to do. He mainly lives above the world, and when he needs to, he becomes involved with the world, but his real place is to be above.

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This is a completely different life than what most people recognize. Certainly there is a way to misuse the concept being described here, like when people sleep all day, or they try to forget about everything, through various forms of escape (which can even include running away into reading books and immersing oneself in *sefarim*). But here we are describing the inner and healthy use of this concept, of living a serene life.

This keeps us above the confusing garden-maze of life (as described in the *Mesillas Yesharim*, how only a person standing above the garden-maze can guide people to get to the center of the maze, because he sees everything from above), which enables us to see the world clearly, seeing everything from above and outside of it. It is when we gain the ability to see from a calm, quiet place inside ourselves. This is the goal - to reach our own personal share, and to see it clearly (which we will get to in the next lessons, with Hashem's help).

Prophecy Vs. Wisdom

There is also another way to “see” from above, and this is generally known as *Ruach HaKodesh*, where a person receives knowledge from a higher source.

The Gemara says that sometimes there are thoughts that fall into a person's mind upon getting up in the morning, and this is a “small prophecy”. The person receives knowledge, but he won't understand what just entered his mind. A person may be in a state of *d'veykus* with Hashem or he is learning Torah, and suddenly he receives a thought of *Ruach HaKodesh*, meaning that the initial thought that falls into his mind (after the *d'veykus* or heavy concentration on his Torah learning) is *Ruach HaKodesh*, and many times you can ask him to explain what the thought is and he cannot explain it. He just knows that this is the thought that fell into his mind, and he cannot understand or explain the thought.

To illustrate this concept, there was once a story (and there are many stories like this as well) that someone came to Rav Chaim Kanievsky complaining that he hasn't yet found his *zivug* (mate), and Rav Chaim said to him, “She wasn't born yet.” The man left the room bewildered, wondering: “Am I supposed to wait now for the next 20 years until she's born?!” Later he married a woman who converted to Judaism, and Chazal said that a convert is like someone who has just been born [he has been reborn, with his new status of joining the Jewish people], and then he understood what Rav Chaim meant, that his wife hadn't been “born” yet. Later when he came back to Rav Chaim and told him what happened, Rav Chaim said, “I didn't understand what I had said then. It just came out of my mouth.”

Sometimes a person is able to receive all kinds of sparks of wisdom that fall into his mind, but he doesn't understand these sudden thoughts, and at best he will only have a partial understanding of it.

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In contrast to the above, there is a higher level of seeing – the wisdom that is above the level of prophecy. There is a clearer way of seeing, where a person is not merely receiving kernels of wisdom and partial understanding, but a picture that is clear.

Chazal said, “A wise person is better than a prophet.” The Ramchal² explains that prophet receives raw information and has to decipher the message, while a wise person is able to see a clear picture. “A wise person sees the outcome”, he can see things even before they happen, because he sees it all in its potential form as it’s in middle of a process unfolding. He can see the world from the outside, unlike a person who is trapped in this world and who can only see within the world, but not outside of it.

A wise person can see the world from above it and outside of it, and this is through the ability to see from a serene place in the soul that he has reached (as we have been explaining until this point). From a quiet soul, he can see reality as it is – both the Creation as a whole, as well as his soul in particular, and from there he will come to recognize the depth of his soul. This ability is also called the “absence that comes before the existence”³, the way to see all of existence from a quiet, calm place that is outside of the world one is found in.

This is the inner way of living, for those who wish to enter inward and find the life of the “wise person is better than a prophet.”

² In sefer *Kelach Pischei Chochmah* (138 Openings To Wisdom)

³ Gra to Yeshayahu 11:1



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