

THE ORAL TORAH AND MAN

**Understanding
The Three Levels of Involvement
Of the Genuine Torah Sages and Students
In Torah SheBaal Peh**

**THE SEQUEL TO
“Why Do I Need to Learn Gemara?!”**

Chaim Rosenblatt

The current work is the sequel to “*Why do I Need to Learn Gemara?!*” It’s strongly recommended that the reader first study that work, in order to get the most out of the present volume.

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Many key themes and ideas found in the current work are based on a Chanukah shiur which I heard from my *rebbe* Rav Amos Luban *shlit”a* of *Yeshivat Netiv Aryeh*, as well as on teachings which I heard from *HaGaon* Rav Moshe Shapira *shlit”a* or read in his name (in *Afikei Mayim – Inyanei Chanukah*, and in the phenomenal books *The Jewish Self: Recovering Spirituality in the Modern World* and *The Choice to Be: A Jewish Path to Self and Spirituality* (Feldheim 2011), both by Rav Shapira’s student – Rav Jeremy Kagan *shlit”a*). Additionally, as with much of my writing, my dear friend and teacher, and esteemed colleague in *Yeshivat Netiv Aryeh* Rav Mendel Weiss *shlit”a*, has been an indispensable help, clarifying for me numerous complex matters discussed in the current work; this volume would simply not exist in its present level of clarity if not for him. Though, notwithstanding these sources, it should be noted that none of the above scholars have read the manuscript of this booklet, and thus the reader should accordingly approach the current volume with the awareness that subtle errors in content (rooted in subtle errors in my understanding of this material) may have unknowingly crept into this presentation.

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Throughout this volume, an emphasis is placed on the fact that the ideas presented here are only applicable to the *genuine Torah sages*. This emphasis is necessary inasmuch as the central theme of this essay – Man’s role in the unfolding of the Oral Torah – can God-forbid come to be confused with the similar sounding (though extremely different) ideas of Conservative Judaism regarding the power of the Rabbis in deciding *halachic* matters. As such, we have constantly stressed the fact that what appears below is *only relevant to the genuine gedolei Yisrael*. In any event, a thorough clarification regarding this point appears in Chapter 21.

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Similar to what was noted in the introductory comments to “*Why Do I Need to Learn Gemara?!*” the current work is not about proofs, but is rather about presenting what the Torah itself teaches about the Oral Torah and the Sages. For proofs concerning these matters, the reader is directed to this author’s “*How Do We Know God Gave the Torah? – Examining the Evidence for the Divine Origin of the Written and Oral Torahs from the Vantage Point of a Skeptic.*”

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Any constructive criticisms or comments that can in any way improve the content and/or quality of this essay (including pointing out spelling or grammatical errors) are greatly welcomed.

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Yeshivat Netiv Aryeh
At the Western Wall

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Section One:

Introductions

Chapter 1

Just Whose Torah is This Anyway?

In the previous volume “Why Do I Need to Learn Gemara?!” we explained that the genuine Torah sages are the mouthpiece for the word of God, and to learn their words is to learn the various facets of the Divine will. As such, for someone who wants to develop his relationship with Hashem via learning about Him – just as in any relationship, where the depth of the relationship is built on the knowledge that each member has of the other one – then the study of Gemara, which is the primary repository of information about God, should certainly play a central role.

But understanding that the Sages serve the role of being loudspeakers for the Divine word still doesn't explain *why* the Torah's been given in such a way that the Sages should play such a prominent role in the first place. That is, on the one hand the Torah is a Divine document, and yet on the other hand, in numerous ways (which are summarized in the next chapter), it requires that Man – in the form of the genuine Torah sages and students – be highly involved, even in the very content of the Torah itself. Is this not odd? If anything, on the contrary; the Torah's Divine origin dictates that Man – even the greatest of men – be given as small a role as possible in its content (if any), lest the Godliness of it get watered down or lost altogether.

In order to fully appreciate this question, let us use the next chapter to lay out clearly the different ways in which Man in fact plays a role in the unfolding of the Oral Torah.

Chapter 2

The Three Levels of Involvement Of the Genuine Torah Sages and Students In *Torah SheBaal Peh*

The first area in which Man plays a role in the Oral Torah is in “keeping it alive” via toiling in its study. Namely, the very fact that the bulk of the Torah is oral, rather than written down, means that either Man studies it with much effort (after all, more effort is required *to receive from a teacher* than to study a text that’s available for reading whenever and as often as the reader wants to read it), and it’s thereby contained within him, or he doesn’t, and those oral traditions end up becoming partially or completely lost (as we’ve unfortunately seen far too many times throughout the difficult journey of Jewish history). Included in this point is not just keeping the raw facts of *Torah SheBaal Peh* alive in this world, but also keeping the proper understanding of those facts alive, inasmuch as the correct understanding, like the laws themselves, isn’t in writing.

The second area in which Man plays a role in the Oral Torah is in the actual final-decisions as to what the *halachah* (practical law) should be. And as we’ll see in the sources in Chapter 8, this *isn’t* only true after a significant amount of Torah was forgotten, thus causing doubt in regards to previously-known laws. Rather, as noted in the *midrash Tehillim* quoted there, a large quantity of Torah was given *to begin with*, with the intention that the Sages should decide from among the various facets of a given topic what the practical law should be.

The final role of Man in *Torah SheBaal Peh* is ultimately an **extension of the previous point** – with the difference being the product of historical circumstances. That is, whereas the decision-making role of the Sages was *originally* meant to pan out specifically in regards to deciding between *clear-cut pre-existing* facets of an issue, as time went on, and internal and external challenges took their toll on the nation, the basic facets of the issues *themselves* became unclear, until reaching a point whereby nearly every detail of the Oral Torah has *at least a degree* of ***inherent ambiguity*** to it. As such, the Sages-of-each-generation’s decision-making capacity has *ever since then* been needed in order to figure out what the essential content of the oral traditions are *altogether*. Another consequence of this fading clarity is the proliferation of enduring *machlokes* (Talmudic disputes between the Sages as to how to understand a given matter, or regarding what the practical law in a given situation should be) hand-in-hand with the

loss of clarity – a phenomenon which was overall absent in the earlier generations of the Jewish nation, when the content of the Oral Torah was still less in doubt.

* * * * *

Each one of these areas of human involvement in the Torah begs the same umbrella question: Why?! Why does Hashem want things to be this way? Why must the Oral-Torah's presence in this world be dependent on Man? Why should the final decisions of God's laws be given over to Man – even men who are the epitome of holiness? And why would Hashem allow for historical circumstances to unfold in such a way that it would result in a complete breakdown of clarity in the contents of *Torah SheBaal Peh*, which would in turn perforce lead to abundant dispute? Furthermore, even if it's explained why Hashem desires Man to play such a central role in the Oral Torah, the question would remain: what's to prevent this matter from becoming a free-for-all? After all, it can't be that just anyone can come along and interpret the Torah however he wants?

It is to answering these questions that the current work is dedicated. We shall designate a complete section to each of these questions, in which we'll bring the relevant sources, expand on the above questions when necessary, and attempt to provide answers.

Let us then begin with an examination of the first topic: the fact that an *unwritten* Torah forces the Torah student *to toil* to acquire it, since being oral, it has no presence in the world other than through those who labor to know it and understand it.

Section Two:

**The Necessity of
Putting in Effort
To Know
And Understand
The Oral Torah**

Chapter 3

Apparently Hashem Wants Effort In Our Torah Study

Indications that God Wants *Limud Torah* to Come Through Effort and Toil

To the extent that the Oral Torah in fact requires *abundant effort* in order to be kept alive in the world and to be properly understood, it would seem that Hashem has an interest in Torah study being accomplished **specifically through effort and toil**. This in turn seems to indicate that the presence of effort is *itself* essential. But if so, why? After all, why's it so terrible if Torah were to be learned amidst ease?

The truth is that there are additional indications that effort is a crucial ingredient in one's *limud Torah*.

Firstly, as noted in Chapter 14 of "*Why Do I Need to Learn Gemara?*", although the Torah always indicates its true intentions with its super-careful wording, the fact remains that in order for even a genuine sage to figure out what the Torah actually says and means, requires immense toil. We thus see that rather than Hashem giving us a *neshamah* that could readily recognize what the Torah's trying to say, He placed within us a soul that doesn't readily discern the Torah's intent except through much labor – implying that the effort involved is an end, of sorts, in and of itself.

We furthermore learned in Chapter 15 of "*Why Do I Need to Learn Gemara?*", that even after much of the Oral Torah was committed to writing (in the form of the *Mishnah*, *Gemara*, and *Rishonim*), it was still written with an inherent ambiguity (whereby virtually every word can be understood in multiple ways), not to mention that all the information relevant to a given topic wasn't placed in one spot, but was rather divided up among different *masechtos*, or different places within a *masechtah*. And we noted there that the explanation behind these phenomena would appear to be that just as a *completely* Oral Torah demands effort (inasmuch as the laws, as well as their proper understanding, have no existence without the efforts of those who labor in *limud Torah SheBaal Peh*), so too, when the Sages were forced by the danger-of-forgetting to commit the Oral Torah to writing, they made sure to do so in such a way whereby abundant effort would still be needed in order to break through the ambiguous texts so as to get to the correct

understanding, as well as in order to put all the seemingly-disparate related sources together. And so once again, we see an emphasis on effort.

The *Midrash Tanchumah* in *Parashas Noach*

The above are indirect indications of the necessity for toil in *limud Torah SheBaal Peh*. But the truth is that this matter is stated explicitly by the Sages in a famous piece from *Midrash Tanchumah – Parashas Noach* #3, which contrasts the Written Torah with the Oral Torah. (In reading this piece, keep in mind that the Oral Torah includes the proper understanding of the Written-Torah’s text – *anything that’s beyond the words themselves* that are stated there.)

Blessed is the name of the King, King of kings, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, who chose Yisrael from among the seventy nations, as it’s written (*Devarim* 32:9) “For the portion of Hashem is His people; Yaakov is the lot of His inheritance.” And He gave us the Written Torah, which is imprinted with hidden and closed hints, and He explained them in the Oral Torah, and revealed them to Yisrael. Furthermore, the Written Torah is general principles, whereas the Oral Torah is the details. The Oral Torah is quantitatively large, whereas the Written Torah is quantitatively small. Regarding the Oral Torah it’s written (*Iyov* 11:9) “Longer than the land is its measure, and wider than the sea.” And it’s written (*Iyov* 28:13) “It shall not be found in the land of the living.” What does it mean that “It won’t be found in the land of the living”? Is this to say that it’s found in the land of the dead?! Rather, [this is to teach that] the Oral Torah won’t be found among one who seeks out the pleasures of this world, lust, honor, and worldly-greatness, but rather in one who kills himself over it [(i.e., one who pushes himself to the edge of his physical limits in his Torah study; see Chapter 21 below)], as it’s written (*Bamidbar* 19:14) “This is the Torah: When a man dies in a tent...” And this is the way of the Torah: One eats bread with salt, drinks water in measure, sleeps on the ground, and lives amidst physical depravity – all the while toiling in Torah (see also *Pirkei Avot* 6:4).

For *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* only made a covenant with Yisrael over the *Torah SheBaal Peh*, as it’s written (*Shemos* 34:27) "כי על פי הדברים האלה כרתי אתך ברית", [which literally translates as “By the mouth of these things have I made with you a covenant with you”]. Our sages, of blessed memory, noted [in this context] that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* didn’t write [in the above verse] "למען הדברים האלה" or "בעבור הדברים האלה" or "בגלל הדברים האלה", but rather "על פי הדברים האלה", which hints to *Torah SheBaal Peh*, which is difficult to learn, and there’s much pain [involved in understanding it], and it’s compared to darkness, as it says (*Yish’ayahu* 9:1) “The people walking in darkness saw a great light.” This refers to those who possess [knowledge of the] *Talmud* who saw a great light, for *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* enlightens their eyes with [halachos concerning] that which is forbidden & permissible, and that which is *tamei* & *tahor*. And in the future [it will be fulfilled in the Torah scholars] “And those who love Him [shall go out] as the sun goes out in all its strength” (*Shoftim* 5:31).

[The truth is that] Yisrael didn't accept upon themselves the Torah until *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* held the mountain over their heads like a *gigit*/[upside-down] barrel (which, if put on a person, would restrain his freedom), as it says (*Shemos* 19:17) "They stood at the bottom of [(i.e., under)] the mountain. And Rav Dimi bar Chama stated: *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* said to them "If you accept upon yourselves the Torah, fine; if not your graves will be here!" (See Shabbos 88a where the Gemara itself discusses why the Jewish people are obligated to keep the Torah considering that it was forced upon them.) [Now,] should you say that it's in regards to the Written Torah that God held the mountain over them, [so that can't be] seeing as from the time that they were informed that they're receiving the Torah, they all called out together saying "נעשה ונשמע"/"We will do and we will hear" [which indicates total willingness to accept the *Torah SheB'Chsav*] – for its study doesn't involve pain and toil, and it's [relatively] small. Rather, God's [warning and subsequent forcing] was in regards to the *Torah SheBaal Peh*, which delves into the small details of both "light" and stringent commandments, and it's harsh like death, for one doesn't learn it unless he loves *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* with all his heart, all his soul, and all his money, as it says (*Devarim* 6:4) "You shall love Hashem your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your wealth." How do we know that this refers to love [of Hashem] in the context of Torah-study? For it's written [shortly] afterwards "And these words which I command you this day shall be on your heart" which refers to *talmud*/Torah-study, [where the words of Torah are placed] on the heart. [Also,] it says [there] "ושונתם לבניך"/"And you shall teach them to your sons" – this refers to *talmud*, which requires *shonon*/sharp-study. [It follows then that the first paragraph of *Kerias Shema* hints to the study of the Oral Torah, whereas the second paragraph – והיה אם שמוע – hints to the study of the Written Torah.] This explains why in the first paragraph of *Kerias Shema*, it doesn't mention any worldly good that comes as a reward for Torah study [inasmuch as its reward is only beyond this world, as noted below]; in contrast, in the second paragraph we do find this – as it says there "and I shall give rain in its time," which refers to reward for those who occupy themselves with the Written Torah, but not with *talmud* (study of the Oral Torah). [Another difference between these two paragraphs is that] in the second paragraph [(which again, hints to *Torah SheB'Chsav*)] it says "בכל לבבכם ובכל נפשכם", but it leaves out "בכל מאדכם"/"with all your wealth" – for in regards to studying the Written Torah, one need not sacrifice material wealth." This teaches that whoever loves wealth and pleasure, can't learn the Oral Torah, which requires much pain and pushing off going to sleep, and one needs to wear oneself away for it. Therefore its reward is only in the World to Come, as it says (*Yish'ayahu* 9:1) "The people walking in darkness saw a great light." This great light refers to the [spiritual] light that was created on the first day of creation, which Hashem hid for those who toil in *Torah SheBaal Peh* by day and by night, in whose merit the world stands, as it says (*Yirmiyahu* 33:25) "So says Hashem: If not for My covenant day and night, I would not have placed the laws of heaven and earth." Which covenant is kept by day and by night? *Talmud* (study of the Oral Torah)...Likewise it says (in *Tehillim* 1:2) "For if in the Torah of Hashem is his desire, and in his Torah he meditates by day and by night..."

The Bottom Line

So the bottom line that we can take out of all the above is: It's apparently not enough for Hashem that a person simply learns Torah, but rather there seems to be an additional need for toil; hence that He wrote the Written Torah in a way that guarantees effort if it's to be properly understood; hence that He placed most of the Torah's information into the unwritten Oral Torah whereby that information is only found in the world and correctly understood to the degree that Man labors to know and understand it; hence that the Sages of the *Torah SheBaal Peh* wrote down portions of the Oral Torah in such a way that the need for effort would be maintained.

* * * * *

We began this discussion by questioning why Hashem made it that so much of the Torah is oral, and thus dependant on Man. In identifying the need for toil as the key to answering this question, and in labeling "putting in effort" as "the name of the game," we haven't really eliminated our original difficulty, but rather we've merely *shifted* it to a different address. For it still begs an explanation: why is Hashem so bent on Torah being acquired by those who study it *specifically through hard work*?

But the truth is that in refocusing the question on the topic of *effort*, we're actually *much closer* to getting to the depth of this matter. For the importance of *toiling* in life altogether, let alone within the context of Torah study, is a matter that's dealt with at length by the great Torah masters. But in order to understand what they say concerning the need for effort, and in order to appreciate how what they say fits in within the larger context of what Judaism is about, we need to first gain a thorough understanding concerning the purpose of creation, and of the primary means towards its fulfillment. (Note: Some of what follows has already been presented in Chapter 2 of "Why do I Need to Learn Gemara?," but the ensuing discussion will be *far more expanded and detailed*.)

Chapter 4

The Purpose of Creation: *Dveikus* (Clinging) to Hashem

The Goal: *Dveikus*

One of the clearest presentations of the purpose of creation can be found in the writings of the Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Lutzato, an 18th century Torah giant who was a total master of Torah thought), particularly in his work *Derech Hashem*, Part I, Chapter 2, which we shall now attempt to summarize and explain.

The Ramchal first notes that Hashem desired to create beings that would receive from Him the ultimate good. However, inasmuch as the greatest good in existence is the good that resides in God, which, being intrinsic to Him, is *nontransferable*, so in order for the created beings to in fact receive that good they need to have *dveikus* to Hashem. That is, they need *to cling* to Him, whereby they can partake of the *shleimus* (perfection) that's found within Him.

Let's now speak out the preceding point with greater detail. Namely, Hashem, in His goodness, wants to bestow of His goodness onto others. And being perfect, He desires specifically to bestow the greatest good possible – which is the goodness that is found within Him. However, inasmuch as this goodness resides only in Him, and is non-transferable, it's not possible to actually *give* of that goodness to another. After all, Godliness – in the sense of **truly-intrinsic** greatness – can't be given to a non-God (who, as a created being, is by definition not intrinsically anything). But if *transferring* the Godly-goodness to a creature isn't relevant, then what *is* relevant is to allow a created being to “plug into” the goodness that's found by God, so as to at least experience it that way.

As a rough metaphor, imagine that there's only enough building material in the whole world to build a single palace. So the kind-hearted king of the palace can't possibly build more palaces for others, as there's no such possibility considering the lack of building materials. Nevertheless, what the king *can* do in his quest to share the delights of his palace with others is he can invite outsiders to at least *come to his palace* and enjoy themselves there. And so it is with God; even if He can't transfer His intrinsic Godly perfection to us, He can give us the opportunity to cling to Him, and *thereby* experience the Godly perfection that resides uniquely in Him.

Having gotten this basic understanding of what the purpose of creation is, let's now try and understand the mechanics behind how *dveikus* is acquired.

Acquiring *Dveikus*: Face to Face, Heart to Heart

Staring Lovingly into the Other's Eyes

Dveikus – clinging – implies deep oneness. But how does one attain such unity with God? We can look at *dveikus* as it pans out in human relationships in order to get an idea.

We find that one of the deepest experiences of oneness that two people who love each other can feel is when each one stares lovingly into the other's eyes. Though, this requires explanation. Why does doing this in fact create such a deep sense of unity between those two individuals? It also needs to be clarified whether this feeling of oneness is the result of the looking at each other's faces per se, or is it rather that the staring into one another's eyes is just a vessel to convey certain feelings, which can ultimately be conveyed even if these two people *weren't* specifically looking at each other.

Direct Relationship

As we'll now explain, the actual face to face encounter is in fact *not* essential, but is rather a means of communicating the reality of **direct-relationship** – with the awareness that the other person is **relating to you directly** being the key to creating oneness. In order to understand this, consider the following scenario. You walk into a store to buy something, and as you extend your hand to pay the cashier, you notice that she's completely focused on her iphone, and doesn't even lift her eyes to look at you. How do you feel? One thing's for sure – you certainly don't feel any closeness to that cashier. After all, she's not relating to you directly at all. To her, you're just a hand extending money; but as far as the individual who's extending the hand – this means nothing to her. In contrast, imagine that as you approach this cashier, she lifts her face with a big smile, and exuding genuine warmth and friendliness, she asks "How are you doing today?" How do you feel now? Pretty good; after all, this person is relating to you directly.

A similar, but alternative, metaphor would be to consider the difference between how you feel when someone is talking to you *while facing you*, versus how you feel when they address you *while facing away from you*, thereby leaving you staring at the back of their head. By the former, where they're relating to you directly, you feel close to them, and by the latter, when they're relating to you indirectly, you feel far from them. Along the same lines, if you're standing among a crowd of hundreds of people, and someone nearby calls

out on a megaphone a generic “I love you,” realizing that this term of endearment *wasn't at all* directed at you in a personal way, but was rather simply blared into the air – and you just happen to be standing there, so such a statement of love is accordingly meaningless to you. In contrast, when someone says “I love you,” and they are addressing you personally, so that's a different story completely, and one is overcome with a positive feeling of being loved.

This all explains why throughout Torah literature, relating to another individual directly is called “פני-בפנים/face-to-face [Relationship]” (see *Shemos 33:11, Devarim 5:4, Devarim 34:10*).

As touched upon above, and as can be discerned from our examples, the key here is *not* the actual seeing each other's faces, *but rather the awareness that the other person is relating to you directly* (with the term “face-to-face” accordingly meant to be understood *conceptually*, rather than literally). This is highlighted by a scenario whereby two people who love each other express as such in a telephone conversation. Even though they're not geographically near each other, they can still feel the oneness that comes from a “face-to-face” encounter, seeing as in any event, they both realize that the other person is **relating to them directly**.

An Actual Face-to-Face Encounter Certainly Adds – But...

Of course, when the direct manner in which the other person relates to you is *literally* in your face so that you can outright see it, as in the earlier example of two people who love each other *who are actually staring into one another's eyes*, then it certainly adds to the experience. That is, it undoubtedly helps an individual to realize that that other person is relating to him directly when he sees so openly. In order understand why this is in fact so, we need to examine the Hebrew word for “face” – פנים (pronounced *panim*). This same word, when the vowel under the פ is changed from a *kamatz* to a *shva*, reads פנים (pronounced *p'nim*), which means *insides*. What's the connection between the face and “insides”? The obvious answer is that the face verily reveals what's going on inside of the heart. If you look at any other part of a person's body, there's no way to know how he's feeling. In contrast, when looking at his *panim*/face, the nature of his *p'nim*/insides at that time is clearly revealed.

Let's now plug this into our main topic of the oneness engendered by a face-to-face encounter. Namely, when each member of a love-based-relationship sees on the other person's face that they relate to them directly, so in the context of the previous paragraph it follows that each individual isn't simply experiencing the other's external façade, but

rather, *on the contrary!* In such a situation, they're each experiencing/witnessing the fact that the other person relates to them directly *in their hearts*. A face-to-face encounter of people who love each other is accordingly so powerful because it's a visible manifestation of the heart-to-heart connection that exists between those two individuals.

At the same time, as noted in the previous subsection of this part of the chapter, the face-to-face aspect of the encounter *is an extra*. For the key to the oneness here is the heart-to-heart connection, with the faces simply testifying to the reality of the heart-to-heart union and providing a visual aid of sorts in regards to it. But the main thing is that the heart-to-heart connection should actually be there – and it can be, whether or not the two people are actually looking at each, as we've seen.

Face-to-Face, Heart-to-Heart

In any event, the preceding discussion clarifies the heading of this part of the chapter: "Face to Face, Heart to Heart." That is, as noted above, the term "face-to-face" is *primarily* intended metaphorically to convey the idea of direct relationship altogether, whereby one relates to a person while conceptually facing him, rather than while conceptually facing away from him. And in this sense the above term means: when people relate to one another in a face-to-face manner, i.e., directly – each one *from their heart*, this creates **a heart-to-heart connection which is verily a real unity between the two of them**. To be sure, **they're still two people. But through the heart-to-heart connection, they have on some level truly become one.**

This all the more so applies when they literally face each other; then this actual face-to-face encounter becomes a conduit that conveys the oneness inasmuch as the *panim* is an expression of the *p'nim*. And thus another meaning of the term "face-to-face/heart-to-heart" is that a literal face-to-face connection creates unity inasmuch as it's a testimony to the reality of the heart-to-heart connection, seeing as it's something that's visible to the other person.

Whatever the case, it's noteworthy that all the biblical sources provided above concerning the term "*panim b'panim*" (*Shemos* 33:11, *Devarim* 5:4, *Devarim* 34:10) **use this term to describe the ultimate relationship**; "ultimate" in regards to the unity that exists between the members of that relationship. This is well understood in light of what we've explained here, that the face-to-face/heart-to-heart connection that emerges from two individuals who lovingly relate to one another from their heart is verily the pathway for creating genuine oneness between two individuals who are otherwise separate.

Qualifications

Before moving on, a number of qualifications are in order.

Firstly, although perhaps obvious, it should be emphasized that the face-to-face/heart-to-heart connection is only relevant when the lovingly-relating-to-the-other-from-the-depths-of-one's-heart is *mutual* between the two people in the relationship.

It should secondly be noted that although the direct-relating-to-one another is the key foundation for creating a heart-to-heart connection, one *doesn't* lovingly relate to another from their heart *in a vacuum*. This rather needs to be built on yet more fundamental foundations, such as thoroughly knowing the other individual and empathizing with them.

Lastly, it needs to be addressed: *How much* of a heart-to-heart connection is created by a face-to-face relationship? Ultimately that depends on the background relationship that we're dealing with; namely, the closer that a given relationship *potentially* is *to begin with*, the greater the degree of oneness that will be produced by realizing that the other person is relating to you directly. That is, *either way* experiencing direct relationship creates feelings of closeness. But *exactly how much* depends on the person who's relating to you. I.e., if it's just a random cashier who's essentially a stranger, the recipient of their friendliness might have a good feeling as a result of this encounter, but we wouldn't call that *dveikus*, for there's no unity between the customer and the cashier. In contrast, when a person realizes that *their father's* relating to them directly, that creates much greater feelings of oneness. And all the more so when it's a husband and wife that are relating to each other directly, it can create a degree of unity that's virtually not found in any other context. This is because the potential closeness of the husband/wife relationship was *much greater to begin with*, as evidenced by the fact that the first time that the Torah ever uses the term *dveikus*, it's in the context of the first ever married couple – Adam and Eve (see *Bereishis* 2:24).

***Dveikus* with Hashem**

Returning to the topic of the purpose of creation, it should now be clearer what it means when we say that the goal of creation is to achieve *dveikus* with Hashem. Namely, this means attaining a state whereby a person understands that Hashem loves him and relates to him directly from His Divine “heart,” and the person reciprocates by lovingly relating directly back to Hashem in a similar manner. And as in human relationships, this requires

learning about Hashem (through learning about His will and His actions via Torah study) and identifying with Him.

(Note: *Dveikus* with God has additional facets to it, such as the soul's *actual connection* to the Light of the *Shechinah*, but these are all beyond the scope of the current work, and are dealt with at length in our book "*Why Does God Care if We Do the Mitzvos?*")

The Question of All Questions

Though, if there's nothing more to this matter, then there's a big question here. Namely, if Hashem wants us to indeed experience *dveikus* with Him, then who needs to descend to the earthly plane of reality in order to fulfill the Torah and *mitzvos*? After all, when the soul was still up in heaven, it was presumably able to realize that God relates to it directly and lovingly, and it was presumably able to relate back in a similar way – in which case it was *already relevant back then* for the *neshamah* to be in a face-to-face/heart-to-heart relationship with Hashem, and to thereby experience *dveikus* with Him. If so, why indeed is it necessary for the soul to descend to *Olam HaZeh* altogether?

So long as we don't know the answer on this question, it follows that even if a person knows the theoretical goal of creation, he's still in the dark as to why it's necessary to be alive down here on earth. As such, it's certainly imperative that we understand the answer on this fundamental question that touches on the very essence of our existence.

Chapter 5

Why a Soul Needs to Choose to Become Godly In Order to Achieve *Dveikus* with Hashem

The Inability to Relate Directly to Anything that Contradicts One's Essence

So why indeed does the soul need to descend to *Olam HaZeh* in order to achieve *dveikus* with Hashem?

Based on how we described the essence of *dveikus* in the previous chapter, this can be well understood. Namely, if the core of *dveikus* is that which each member of a relationship relates directly to one another from their heart, then it follows that in any situation where there's a **fundamental block** to either side of the relationship relating directly to the other one, *dveikus* is a virtual impossibility.

Though, what would in fact be a cause for someone becoming blocked from directly relating to another individual? This can be understood in light of the teaching of the Sages in the *Talmud Yerushalmi, Maseches Orlah* 1:3 which states "One who eats from his friend[’s food] is embarrassed to look him in the face." (This is quoted by *Tosafos* in *Kiddushin* on מצוה כ"ה כל מצוה כ"ה.) The implication is that when one receives charity, he feels shame, and one of the manifestations of this embarrassment is the inability to face that which is the cause of the shame (in this case, the one who's bestowing the charity).

What's the deeper explanation of these words of the Sages? That is, why is it that a person receiving *tzedakah* turns away from his benefactor, and what's the idea behind "turning the other way altogether?" The explanation is as follows.

A person was created *b'tzelem Elokim* – in the image of God. This is a multifaceted topic, but a key aspect of this point that's relevant to our discussion is that just as Hashem receives nothing from anyone outside of Himself, so too the *neshamah* is motivated to act *on its own behalf*, rather than receive things from outsiders. It's in this context that the Sages teach (in *Bava Metziah* 38a) "A person would rather have one portion [of grain] that he worked for, than nine portions that were given to him by his friend." As such, for the soul to receive charity is a total contradiction to its essence which wants to earn

everything for itself (either in the form of a salary, or in the form of *meriting* gifts). And what the Sages are teaching in the above statement is that **when a person is hit with a contradiction to his inner essence, he can't face that thing which is the source of that contradiction – and thus he turns the other way.** Now, just as in regards to “face-to-face,” we saw that it's not necessarily a literal idea, but rather primarily represents *the concept* of direct relationship, so too it would appear to be the same concerning the idea of “turning the other way.” That is, the essence of this point is that **when something outside of a person contradicts his internal reality, he can't relate to that thing directly, and thus he *conceptually* “turns away.”**

(It should be noted that this is what the idea of “shame” is all about; namely, shame is the experiencing of a contradiction *between* one's inner essence *and* something outside of oneself – be it what people think of you, expect of you, or do for you. However, further discussion of how the above ideas relate to shame, as well as life-situations that seem to contradict the above claim that a person who's created *b'tzelem Elokim* has an aversion to charity – so this is all beyond the realm of the current volume, and is dealt with at length in our book “*Why Does God Care if We Do the Mitzvos?*”)

The Inability for a Soul to Relate Directly Back to Hashem Were It Not to Descend to the Physical Plane

In any event, once we know that a contradiction to one's essence blocks a person from relating directly to the source of that contradiction, it can be appreciated why the soul's “getting *dveikus* for free” up in heaven is simply not going to work. This is because it could be that if the soul wouldn't descend to the physical plane of reality, then Hashem would *in any event* relate to it directly and lovingly – but there would still be little if any *dveikus*. This is because under such circumstances, **the soul wouldn't be able to relate directly back to Hashem!** And with the face-to-face aspect of the relationship thus disrupted *in this direction*, the heart-to-heart connection would accordingly not exist either.

The explanation of this matter is with the concepts that we learned about above. Namely, if the soul in fact wouldn't descend to This World, then it could never relate back to Hashem in a direct/face-to-face manner seeing as were that to be the case, God and the soul would be *fundamentally different*. For although the *neshamah*, which was created in the image of God, possesses human versions of the Godly attributes – and in this sense is similar to Hashem, still, at the same time, there's a *gigantic dissimilarity* between such a

soul and God; for God's perfection is **intrinsic to Him** to the extent that it cannot be otherwise, whereas a soul's perfection was **completely programmed from the outside** (by God), and accordingly could've easily been different. In this sense, Man's *given* attributes can be compared to the reflection of a good-looking individual in a mirror. Whereas that handsome person actually possesses that appearance, the beauty reflected in the mirror has absolutely nothing to do with the mirror; and if an unattractive individual were to look in the mirror, the mirror would reflect those looks just the same. So too, Man *himself* has nothing to do with the Divine qualities that he's been invested with – in which case he's basically *nothing like God*, whose attributes *are* inherent to Him. If the *neshamah* would then try and experience a face-to-face relationship with Hashem, it would fail to do so, because the reality of Hashem on the outside and its internal reality/essence on the inside are fundamentally distinct. And with this complete disruption of *the possibility* for a face-to-face/heart-to-heart connection, the soul could never experience the *dveikus* with Hashem that it was created to experience.

(It should be noted that there are three *additional* “contradictions” between the nature of the almighty Creator and the essence of the *neshamah* – which is a created being. But those are beyond the scope of this discussion, and the one contradiction noted in the previous paragraph will suffice for us to clarify our main topic – the Divinely-established need for effort in Man's study of *Torah SheBaal Peh*. Once again, a much broader and more-detailed presentation of this subject can be found in this writer's “*Why Does God Care if We Do the Mitzvos?*”)

This then explains why *not* descending to the earthly plane is *simply not going to work!*; for if so, the default status of the *neshamah* is that it's in a state that excludes the possibility of *dveikus* with God. Though, it still remains to be explained: Why exactly does the soul's descent to *Olam HaZeh* in fact help?

The Solution: Choosing to Become a Godly Individual

Well, if the core obstacle to a face-to-face/heart-to-heart connection with Hashem is the dissimilarity that exists between the Creator and the created beings, then **the pathway towards overcoming this hindrance is for the created beings to attempt to become as similar to the Creator as possible** (relatively speaking, of course). Now, just as there are four specific points of dissimilarity between the Creator and the *neshamah* (as noted in the parentheses above), so too it follows that the solution will likewise require *four* sub-pathways, each of which deals with one of the differences. But for now we shall limit our

discussion to the one contradiction that has been noted above; i.e., the fact that Hashem has *intrinsic* perfection, whereas a created-being has *programmed* perfection, that's simply like a reflection. So in regards to this, **the solution is that beyond the bare minimum that must perforce be given by Hashem, the created-beings should seek to acquire further Godly perfection of their own accord, through free choice.** In this manner, they will become the “owners” of their perfection (to use the Ramchal's way of putting things), rather than just being programmed robots.

Let us speak this out in more detail. Namely, when a soul descends to the earthly plane of existence, it's faced with countless spiritual-obstacles, each of which tries to pull it off the path towards living a Godly life. But if through the exercising of free will, the soul manages to nevertheless choose to acquire Divine perfection (i.e., its parallel in human terms), then the acquired perfection will now be **attributed to the *neshamah* that chose to attain it.** Such perfection will in turn be considered relatively-intrinsic to this individual (although obviously not as intrinsic as Hashem's perfection is to Him). With this whole new scale of similarity that the soul shares with God (again, relatively speaking), it will be able to not just be looked at lovingly by Hashem, but it will additionally be able to “look back”; that is, relate directly back to Hashem. And from this mutual loving conceptual-focus on one another, and the attendant awareness of the *neshamah* to the reality of this face-to-face relationship, the soul will be able to have a heart-to-heart connection with Hashem, which is the essence of *dveikus* (as we learned earlier).

Of course, as touched upon in the previous paragraph, in order for free will to be relevant, the soul needs to be in a realm whereby choosing to be Godly is *not* obvious, and there's room for entertaining otherwise. This is verily why the soul has to descend to *Olam HaZeh*; for the physical plane of reality provides the right circumstances for a person to achieve Godly perfection *out of free choice*, rather than as the programmed robot that he starts off like (this is all clarified by the Ramchal in *Derech Hashem*, Part I, Chapter 2).

(Note once again that that which similarity-to-Hashem creates *dveikus* with Him has an additional – and more fundamental – layer to it that we haven't delved into here, but we're limiting our discussion to the minimum that's needed for this booklet's main topic, with further details available in “*Why Does God Care if We Do the Mitzvos?*”)

Chapter 6

Choosing Amidst Effort And a Basic Understanding of Why Effort is So Essential to *Limud Torah*

It follows from the preceding discussion that the name of the game in life is **to choose to acquire Godly perfection**, and this is very much what Judaism's game-plan of Torah and *mitzvos* are about, as we clarify at length in our above-mentioned book about doing *mitzvos*.

Though in light of all that we've learned, it can be understood that it's *not just* about choice; **it's rather also largely about effort**. For the choice itself is just a stepping stone in order to make the Godly perfection that one attains more attributed to him. But if so, effort is also essential to the process. **Because the more effort and toil that's involved in the decision making and in the subsequent acquisition of Godly *shleimus*, the more it's attributed to the person, and the more it becomes relatively-intrinsic to that individual**, which is what we're aiming for in the quest to achieve a face-to-face/heart-to-heart connection with God. (Note: Obviously Hashem Himself doesn't require effort to do anything. But our point is that effort is *the means for a human being* to emulate that which Hashem is the way that He is *from within*, without His nature being determined by something outside of Himself.)

This then provides major illumination in regards to the question raised in Chapter 3 above, concerning the need for effort in Torah study. For Torah study bestows abundant Godly-perfection upon a person – which is certainly important, but it's only truly a fulfillment of the goal if it's *attributed to that person*, and this is only the case when it comes *through labor and toil*, whereby the more the effort that's invested, the more the goal is fulfilled.

Though, in order to truly appreciate these ideas, we need to get a clearer picture of the various ways in which *limud Torah* in fact bestows Divine perfection upon a person. The next chapter will be dedicated to a clear presentation of this matter.

Chapter 7

The Godly-Perfection Achieved Through Torah Study

Introduction

The *shleimus* that's achieved through *limud Torah* can be divided into two-which-are-three main categories. That is, there's the two main points, namely that 1) The Torah is itself a manifestation of God's Infinite Light, and through learning it, one achieves a degree of one-ness with Hashem not found in virtually any other context – which surely elevates a person spiritually (as discussed in our essay *Inter-Dimensional Torah*); and 2) When a person learns Torah, a special Divine force emanates from God's "mouth" (as it were), which brings out the potential *shleimus* of a person. Though, this last point itself breaks down into two sub-points. That is, there's the effect that this special Divine force has on a person's *neshamah in general* – whereby it's basically like food/gasoline for the soul (as discussed in Chapter 21 of "*Why Do I Need to Learn Gemara?*") and accordingly brings out the soul's inherent potential for achieving Godly perfection; and then there's the effect that this force has on the mind, whereby it gives a person knowledge and understanding of the *divrei Torah* that are embedded in the *neshamah* since the beginning of its existence (as discussed in Chapters 9 & 20 of "*Why Do I Need to Learn Gemara?*").

Although these matters have been dealt with in the above sources, we'll discuss them in the current work too (together with some new information) in order that the message of the previous chapter can be fully appreciated.

The Leshem on the *Shleimus* Achieved Through Torah Study (Inasmuch as the Torah is Verily the Infinite Light)

The mystical texts explain that God reveals Himself through an emanation of Divine Light known as the Infinite Light. The Leshem (Rav Shlomo Elyashiv *zatzal*, author of the multi-volume work *Leshem Shvo V'Achlamah*) in turn clarifies that the Torah is on some level synonymous with that Light, and thus to learn it is to achieve *dveikus* with God to an unprecedented degree – which, as noted above, perforce elevates a person in the direction of achieving relative Divine perfection. Let's now quote from some of the

places where the Leshem discusses this (all page numbers here refer to the old Attieh edition).

“... For behold! The entire Torah, in its ultimate essence, is **one and the same** as the Light emanated from God, may His name be blessed – *the Infinite Light*. (*Sefer HaDei'ah Part II*, pg. 29, left column)

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The Holy Torah ... in its essence, is a revelation of *the Infinite Light*. (*Sefer HaDei'ah Part II*, pg. 118, left column)

* * * * *

Behold, the primary revelation of Hashem's will, through which He's revealed to us, is the Torah and *mitzvos*...

The revelation of His will, through which He's revealed to us, is a revelation of God's *Elokus* (Divine essence). This explains the great obligation to be occupied in Torah [study]. **For it is known that [when one thinks about an idea], השכל והמשכיל והמושכל, אהד הד/ the mind of the thinker, the one who emanated that idea to begin with, and the idea itself all become one/unified. And when a person intellectually ponders and knows something from the Torah, he truly clings to and becomes unified with Hashem's will**, for that knowledge becomes a part of his intellect – which is one of the facets of his soul, and he thus verily becomes one with God's *ratzon*. And when he merits to know the entire Torah, which has 248 positive commandments and 365 negative commandments parallel to the human being who has 248 limbs and 365 muscles & sinews, *and* he additionally fulfills them even with his body, then the entirety of the person – body and soul – **cling to and become unified with God's will**. It's for this reason that *Devarim* 4:4 speaks of “And all you who are clinging to Hashem your God...”

...**And because all of His will that was revealed to us is a spreading-out/derivative of His light itself, therefore one Who clings to His will [(by learning Torah and thinking about its concepts)] clings to Hashem Himself.** [Again], this is the implication of *Devarim* 4:4 which speaks of “And all you who are clinging to Hashem your God...”

...**His will is the reality of His light itself, and therefore one who clings to His will [(again, through pondering Torah concepts)], verily clings to God Himself.** (*Hakdamot U'She'arim* (Introductions and Gates), in Gate 1, Chapters 7-8)

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The essence of the Torah is *the Infinite Light* ... After Moses brought the Torah down to the world, the goal is that through the learning of Torah and the fulfillment of the positive and negative commandments, the light of God [i.e. *the Infinite Light*] will be drawn down into all dimensions more and more ... [The light of] the holy Torah [being synonymous with *the Infinite Light*] is the first root of all that exists. **It accordingly has the ability to purify and rectify everything that exists** and to ultimately bring everything to the unity from which it came... (*Sefer HaDei'ah Part II*, pg. 31, left column)

Further expansion on this facet of Torah and Torah study is beyond the scope of the current work, and the reader is directed to our booklet *Inter-Dimensional Torah* for a much more thorough and detailed treatment of this topic.

The Ramchal on the *Shleimus* Achieved Through Torah Study

Gasoline for the Soul

The next source which we wish to relate regarding the *shleimus* engendered by *limud Torah* is **Derech Hashem Part IV 2:1-2** (as translated by Rav Abba Tzvi Naiman in *The Elucidated Derech Hashem*, pp. 476-481; the square brackets are words that Rav Naiman himself adds in order to bring clarity to what the Ramchal says). Before relating this piece, it should be noted that a word that will come up a lot here is “*shefa*” or “*hashpa'ah*.” Regarding this difficult-to-translate word, Rav Naiman writes (in *The Elucidated Derech Hashem*, pg. 285, footnote 3, commenting on *Derech Hashem Part II 5:1*):

“There’s no English equivalent for the word *shefa*. *Shefa* is the energy that Hashem imparts to the world to animate it. It is like the electricity that runs through a mechanical device that keeps it operational. The common translations of “influence” and “bounty” do not convey that meaning. In the words of the Ramchal (*Daas Tevunos*, sec. 102), *shefa* is what arrives from the Creator to His creations to act upon them.”

In any event, having clarified that, let us now relate the words of the Ramchal regarding the perfection attained through Torah study.

The study of Torah is essential, because without it one cannot arrive at [proper] performance [of the *mitzvos*]. For if one doesn’t know what he’s commanded to do, how will he [be able] to fulfill [the *mitzvah*]? However, besides for all this, the study of Torah plays a fundamental role towards one perfecting himself.

[This is because] among the various *hashpa'os* that emanate from Hashem for the needs of His creatures, there is one *hashpa'ah* that stands above all the other *hashpa'os*, whose substance is the most noble and the most supreme of anything that could possibly be found among the created beings. This means that it is the ultimate of what could possibly be found among the created beings most resembling Hashem's true existence, with a nobility and supremacy resembling the true stature of Hashem. It is this *hashpa'ah* that Hashem imparts, from His Glory and Nobility, to His creations, and Hashem bound this *hashpa'ah* to something that He created for this purpose – and that is the Torah.

This matter can be implemented in two ways: by uttering the words and through cognitive understanding (comprehension)...

There are many gradations to this *hashpa'ah*, like all the other *hashpa'os* and matters within existence. These gradations are distributed within the elements of utterance and cognitive understanding, according to what the Divine wisdom saw as proper. Thus reciting one section of Torah will draw downwards one level of the *hashpa'ah*, while reciting another section of Torah will draw downwards another level. The same holds true for the cognitive understanding; [depending on what section of Torah is understood, the appropriate *hashpa'ah* will be drawn downwards]; but there's no element of Torah study that will not draw downwards one of the levels of this eminent *hashpa'ah*, if the necessary conditions are fulfilled.

Before continuing, it's important that this point not be confused with the previous one. Namely, above we quoted from the Leshem that the Torah itself is a manifestation of God's Infinite Light, whereas here the idea is that when a person engages in *limud Torah*, a powerful Divine energy emerges from Hashem upon the one who's occupying himself in Torah study. These points are **presumably** related; namely, *limud Torah* draws forth this special *hashpa'ah* from Hashem because it itself is a direct manifestation of the Infinite Light emanated by God. But at the same time, these are two distinct points, as noted earlier in this paragraph.

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What's the power of the *hashpa'ah* brought about by *limud Torah* that the Ramchal discusses? As touched upon earlier, it basically serves as gasoline for the *neshamah*, *bringing out the soul's spiritual potential*. This matter has been presented clearly by Rav Mendel Weiss in Chapter 21 of "*Why Do I Need to Learn Gemara?*", and we'll repeat it here considering its relevancy to the current topic.

[Let's now discuss] the "power of the Torah." That is, the Torah has been imbued by God with the ability to influence those who learn it to draw close to Hashem and His Will. We

shall now attempt to explain this secret power of the Torah, and from this understanding one will also be able to gain greater insight into why there is so much emphasis on learning Torah *even when* it does not seem to have any immediate practical implications.

In *Derech Hashem* (see Part I, Chapters 3 and 4) the Ramchal explains that a person is made from a **spiritual soul** which has a desire to be close to God, and a **physical body** whose natural inclination is to direct a person *away* from the desire to be close to his Creator. To the extent that one gives proper care and nurture to his spiritual soul, to that extent he will **naturally** want to relate to God. On the other hand, to the extent that the soul is neglected and the person becomes associated **exclusively** with his physical body, to that extent it will be very difficult for him to feel any natural desire to draw close to Hashem. In different words, although every Jew has a spiritual soul (the *neshamah*), still, without proper care, it will not be activated, and the person will always feel that relating to Hashem is a burden. And it goes without saying that, under such circumstances, it will be quite difficult to engage Hashem in the active husband-wife-like relationship described in Section One of this book.

What can one do to indeed nurture his soul? The Ramchal explains further (see *Derech Hashem* Part I, Chapter 4, Section 9 – though *see the whole chapter in order to understand the context, together with Part IV, Chapter 2*) that Hashem created **one thing which has the ability to actualize one's spiritual potential more than anything else in the entire creation, and this is the Torah – whose power we access by learning it**. The reason for this, he explains, is *not only* because the Torah instructs a person what to do, but primarily because **the learning itself induces a special emanation which comes forth out of Hashem Himself** and brings a person to want to be close to God. This emanation has the power to **activate the soul** and uncover the person's deeper desire to relate to Hashem. [In the continuation of this chapter, this emanation will be referred to as "Torah energy."] It should be noted that this emanation is none other than the one discussed in Chapters 9 and 20 of the current volume, which, as we saw there, is said to emanate from God's "mouth," the place from which the *neshamah* – Hashem's *neshimah*/breath – came forth in the first place, and from which this new Divine energy comes forth to empower the soul in its battle to achieve spiritual perfection. However, whereas we (based on the Ramchal's *Derech Eitz Chaim*) previously focused on the effects of this emanation on the innate Torah knowledge which is embedded in the *seichel* (intellectual) aspect of the *neshamah*, the above sources in *Derech Hashem* are more focused on how this Divine energy empowers the soul in its struggle to overcome the negative pulls of physical reality.

In any event, **a person who wants to feel close to Hashem without exposure to the special "Torah energy" is like someone who wants to drive a car without gasoline; it simply doesn't work**. This itself is the meaning of the words of the Sages (*Bava Basra* 16a), that Hashem tells us "I have created the evil inclination and I have created the Torah which is its remedy." The Ramchal explains there that this teaches us that a person needs to be constantly involved in learning (that is, to have some time set aside for learning each day), and it's not enough to simply know the basic laws of daily life. On the surface this teaching seems very

strange. After all, even if one is not actively involved in learning Torah, let him protect himself from his evil inclination based on the knowledge of what is forbidden? The answer is in accordance with the above teaching of the Ramchal, that it is **the very process of learning-the-Torah itself** which serves as a remedy for the *yeitzer ha'rah*, for the Torah contains within it a special power which inspires the person to return to Hashem.

A similar idea is found in the writings of *Rabbeinu Bechaye*. In **כד הקמה**, in the section **ערך המדה**, he explains that just like the physical body needs food in order that it should stay alive, so too a person's spiritual soul needs "food" to stay alive, and **this spiritual sustenance is none other than the Torah**. Therefore, he explains, we find that the Torah is compared to "**להם**" (bread) many times in the *Tanach* (see for example *Mishlei* 9:5 with its commentaries). And it's for this reason that we find that there are only two blessings that are a Torah obligation. One is the blessing after eating a meal and one is the blessing for learning Torah. The common denominator between the two is *sustenance*; *birchas ha'mazon* involves thanks to Hashem for His sustenance of the physical body, and *birchas ha'Torah* is regarding sustenance of the soul.

With this understanding one can gain insight into the secret behind the growth of so many young men who return for a second year of learning in Israel which they would have thought to be impossible just a year before. When a person commits himself to begin learning Torah in a serious way, even though it might be difficult for him (and at the beginning he might even say that it is as "boring as hell" or worse), he immediately begins to **activate his spiritual soul**. In most cases, by the middle of the Yeshiva year, the person's **newly activated soul** has begun to convince the student that the learning isn't so bad after all, and by the end of the year the person can't believe that he actually wants to come back for a second year (or at least continue learning in a more serious way wherever Hashem may lead him).

At this point, one might be wondering (and rightfully so): why is *limud Torah* different than all of the other *mitzvos*? Don't they all have the power to draw one close to Hashem? The Vilna Gaon gives two metaphors to clarify the difference between the Torah and the *mitzvos*. Based on a verse in *Mishlei* 6:23 which says "**נר מצוה ותורה אור**" (a *mitzvah* is like a lamp and the Torah is like light), he explains that ultimately the *mitzvos* perfect a person **so that** he can receive the light of the Torah properly. And just like a lamp which doesn't shine hasn't begun to express its function, so too a person who has no connection at all to any Torah learning has not yet begun to express his spiritual essence. In a second metaphor he explains that each *mitzvah* is parallel to a part of the body, whereas the Torah is parallel to **life itself**.

These ideas are all well understood in view of what has already been explained above. That is, a person is made of a physical body and a spiritual soul. The *mitzvos* "fix" (i.e. purify) one's physical body so that it has the potential to receive an active connection with one's spiritual soul. This is similar to the preparation of a lamp which will provide a place for light to express itself in the world. However, the Torah **gives life to one's spiritual soul itself**, and

without this the person will never be able to relate to a deeper spiritual connection with Hashem altogether. Torah study is thus like the kindling of the light which emanates from the lamp, allowing one to perceive the true reality which is found before him in the world.

Actualizing the Inherent Wisdom of the Mind (“From His Mouth, Knowledge and Understanding”)

As touched upon earlier, in regards to the above-mentioned *hashpa'ah* from Hashem that's engendered by Torah study, besides the effect that it has on the soul in general (as was noted in the previous section of this chapter), it also has a specific effect on the mind, to bring out the inherent Torah wisdom that's embedded in the *neshamah* from the beginning of its existence. This matter has been dealt with in great detail in Chapter 9 of “*Why Do I Need to Learn Gemara?*” from where we'll now quote the relevant pieces:

The *Shlah HaKadosh* (*Shnei Luchos HaBris*, by the 17th Century Torah giant Rav Avraham HaLevi Horowitz *zatza"l*), in his commentary on the *Chumash* “*Torah SheB'Chsav*” on *parashas Bereishis*, א, ב, explains (quoting the Arizal) that a Jewish *neshamah* and the Torah itself are intimately connected. This is because the same Divine light that is revealed in the Torah is **also** the root of the Jewish souls, with each unique *neshamah* embodying a particular portion of “Torah light,” thus making it an extension of a particular understanding of the Torah. As such, each soul has an inherent knowledge of *its* portion of Torah – [albeit in seed form] – inasmuch as it's *actually rooted in* the Divine light embodied in those *divrei Torah*.

It follows that when a person in *Olam HaZeh* (This World, i.e., the current plane of existence) learns Torah, *what's actually happening* is he's accessing the innate knowledge already contained within his *neshamah* of his portion in Torah; he's actualizing the potential that was contained within the “Torah seed” implanted in his soul.

This should not be confused with the famous teaching (in *Niddah* 30b) that an angel teaches each individual its portion in Torah while in the womb, or with the tradition (brought by Rav Shlomo Luria in his introduction to *Yam Shel Shlomo* on *Bava Kamma*) that each soul was present at *Har Sinai*, where it received its unique portion in Torah. For what the *Shlah* is saying is *more fundamental* than that; he's explaining that an individual's portion in Torah is **one with the soul**, inasmuch as they're both derived from the same Godly light. But if so, where do the above two teachings concerning learning in the womb and receiving one's portion at *Matan Torah* fit in? Those are additional items that Hashem has given a person in order to make relearning those *divrei Torah* within his lifetime more within his reach. That is to say, *that portion* in Torah was the person's from the start of his soul's existence. But through *additionally* receiving it at *Har Sinai*, as well as learning it before birth, a certain impression is left on the soul that will allow it to relearn that Torah through the appropriate effort during that person's sojourn on earth.



In any event, the above idea is likewise expressed by the Ramchal, in his essay *Derech Eitz Chaim* (printed in the back of many copies of *Messilas Yesharim*), where he *additionally* clarifies the exact process whereby that inner knowledge is brought to light.

The Ramchal's words center on the verse in *Mishlei* 2:6 – “For Hashem grants wisdom; from His mouth – *daas*/knowledge and *tevunah*/understanding.” In explaining this *possuk*, the Ramchal first notes that we find that the Torah is compared to light (see *Mishlei* 6:23). He then explains that the comparison – particularly to light *in the form of fire*, is a very specific one. Namely, a fire can begin in a glowing ember, but in that state the fire is hidden and locked within the coal. However, **when blown upon**, the fire becomes inflamed and spreads. Furthermore, numerous shades of color now become apparent in those flames. And so it is with the Torah. The letters and words of the Torah are like glowing embers – there's a fire in them, but in a suppressed state. When one then studies the Torah, and ponders these letters and words, a multi-colored “fire” then emerges, these being the concepts and ideas which were hidden in each letter. This is why the *Tanna* in *Pirkei Avos* 5:23 says “Turn it over, and turn it over again, for all is in it” – because those who study Torah must indeed “turn over” the words of the Torah again and again just as one would do with a piece of coal, until the flames of the Torah's wisdom flare up – revealing numerous colors, these being the numerous facets of Torah [(which were mentioned above in Chapters 6)].

The Ramchal then continues by noting that **the process of the mind understanding [Torah] is similar to the process of unlocking the Torah's wisdom**, using the above verse from *Mishlei* 2:6 to make the point. He explains that similar to the fire in the coal, **we** contain wisdom within our hearts that was granted to us by God – **but** the proper understanding of it is locked in. And just as the coal needs to be blown upon in order to unlock its flame, so too regarding the *chochmah* within our hearts. And this is what the verse in Proverbs is saying: Hashem has given a person wisdom *right off the bat*, but the individual lacks knowledge and understanding of it. However, [when one initiates the process of understanding through his mental efforts,] Hashem, as it were, “blows upon” the inherent wisdom “from His mouth,” thus allowing the person to achieve knowledge (which refers to connecting with the ideas) and understanding of the relevant information. This knowledge and understanding also *already existed within the person* in a state of potential, but for this potential to be actualized – and for this *daas* and *tevunah* to be *revealed* – requires this special Divine force.

The Ramchal adds that the idea of “the mouth” here (that is, the conceptual “mouth of Hashem”) is that this is *where the souls emanate from*, as it were. That is, the Hebrew word for soul is *neshamah*, which is similar to the word *neshimah*, which means *breath*, because the *neshamos* are from “the breath” that emerges from the Divine “mouth.” And so from the same “mouth” from which the souls derive, there also comes a special emanation *that empowers the soul*, and it's the study of Torah which inspires the bestowing of this special Divine energy. **(Of course, the exact nature of these mystical items is beyond our**

understanding, but at least these ideas allow us to have a basic comprehension of why “the mouth” is said to be the source of these Godly emanations.)

In any event, one can ask on the above words of the Ramchal: What’s the nature of this inner wisdom that one possesses *right off the bat*? It appears quite clearly that he’s referring to the ideas which we quoted from the *Shlah* above, that **because each *neshamah* is rooted in the light of the Torah – each soul being rooted in a particular facet/understanding/approach to the Torah – it therefore contains an inherent knowledge of its portion of Torah, albeit that it needs to be brought out.** And again, the Ramchal is adding here that *the way* it’s brought out is through a special Divine energy that’s “blown from God’s mouth” on the individual who toils to understand what the Torah says.

* * * * *

Let’s now examine one more aspect of Divine perfection that can be achieved through Torah study

An Additional Facet of *Shleimus* Engendered by *Limud Torah*: Seeing the World from the Vantage Point of the *Neshamah*

As stated explicitly in *Derech Hashem*, Part I, 2:5, and as can be seen throughout that work, the Ramchal notes that the primary source of *chisarone* (spiritual deficiency) is *chomriyus* – coarse physicality, whereas the root of *shleimus* (perfection) is *haskalah* – which refers to that which builds up and amplifies the expression of the soul. If so, one can readily appreciate a major additional way in which Torah study leads to the acquisition of *shleimus*. After all, *limud Torah* is a primary fulfillment of *haskalah*, whereby one examines each item of the physical world, and *seeing beyond its raw physicality*, one comes to understand the spiritual significance of that entity. And if this is true of even the Written Torah, then it’s certainly true of the Oral Torah, whereby one openly seeks to understand the potential that everything in the world has *in regards to* the acquisition of *shleimus* and the avoidance of *chisarone*. All of this indeed involves using one’s *seichel* (שכל is the root of the word השכלה), and not just following the dictates of chomer. And with the *seichel*, one can understand the true spiritual-function of an item, and thereby use it in a way that brings it to its completion.

This point is masterfully presented in Rav Jeremy Kagan’s *The Choice to Be*, which we quote in Chapter 18 of “*Why Do I Need to Learn Gemara?*”, and we’ll now repeat here the relevant pieces in the context of the current discussion:

But man lives through his consciousness of his surroundings and sees himself reflected there. So we can get to the self indirectly by changing our awareness of the world. Though that awareness is influenced by our experience of self, and our self is now spiritually barren, **we can consciously override that effect and alter our perception of the world to a more spiritual interpretation. We can slowly and painstakingly reconstruct our vision of reality, coming to see it as it would appear in the context of true relationship with God. Element by element, we can ask, “What is the significance of this object? How does it obligate me or help me fulfill my responsibilities? What role does it play in my relationship with the Creator?” If we do this honestly, we will slowly come to experience ourselves as living in God’s world.** We will then find our true self mirrored there.

This requires the monumental undertaking of reunderstanding every detail of existence to fit in the framework of a world created by God. Apart from the difficulty resulting from the magnitude of the undertaking, how are we to know this deeper truth when we are so spiritually cut off? Our guide for this is the *Torah SheBaal Peh*, the Oral Torah, that applies the principles of the prophetic Written Torah to the details of experience. (*The Choice to Be*, pg. 369; emphasis added)

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For us to read the Torah and expect to jump to its perspective is unrealistic. Since we are not anchored in the aspect of humanity naturally associated with the Torah, presuming to adopt the Torah vision would be fantasy, for it does not relate to reality as we experience it. If we want to achieve a deeper perspective that is grounded, and thus awaken our truer self, **we need to build from where we are toward this deeper vision.**

The Oral Torah is the aspect of Torah that allows us to recover a deeper perception of reality even when we are not centered in our depths. In prophetic times, when our perception was based in our spiritual being, the prophetic Written Torah spoke directly to us, and the Oral Torah played the role of bridging spiritual concepts to physical reality. Through the Oral Torah we unraveled the particular details of actions by which ideals could be expressed. But eventually we ceased perceiving reality from the vantage of the soul. This was evident in the passing of prophecy from human experience, and the loss of any inclination to worship, which both occurred as Greece rose to empire and our modern perspective was born. At that time, the basis of our awareness shifted from our spiritual self to our physical being.

After this change, the Oral Torah continues its role of bridging physical expression and the spiritual principles of the prophetic Written Torah that are its basis. But the Oral Torah’s direction has reversed. **Through it, we now derive, from the detailed expressions of ideals, what those ideals are, and how every element of our world is perceived from a spiritual perspective. This gives us the ability to recover our spiritual vision from the**

midst of the physical world in which we stand, even though spirituality is no longer intuitive.

Man sees himself reflected in his world. When we build meticulously from where we actually stand, and genuinely regain the spiritual view, we awaken the deeper part of ourselves to which it speaks. The Oral Torah is our ladder to climb out of the pit of modern consciousness. (*The Choice to Be*, pp. 429-430; emphasis added; see also pp. 24 and 444)

Summary and Transition to the Next Section

Let us conclude this chapter by summarizing the bottom line. We questioned above why Hashem made it that the Oral Torah neither exists in this world nor can it be understood except through abundant effort on the part of those who study it. We in turn noted that it would seem to be because Hashem desires that Torah study come through specifically labor and toil. Though, this point itself begged an explanation; after all, why's effort so important? Between what we learned in Chapters 4-6 concerning the need to be like Hashem (which requires *achieving relative Godly perfection through free will and effort* so that it's attributed to the person himself, just as Hashem is the way that He is completely *from within*, rather than being programmed from the outside) and what we learned in the current chapter (that Torah study is a means for attaining *shleimus* in a number of distinct ways), it follows that the need for effort and toil in Torah study is well understood.

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Thus concludes our discussion of the first role played by Man in the Oral Torah: *laboring* to keep it alive in the world and to understand what it says. Let us now move on to the second and third roles that Man plays in the Oral Torah: decision-making regarding practical law, as well as regarding the facets of a topic upon which the halachah is based – an aspect of Man's involvement in *Torah SheBaal Peh* that's on the one hand relevant to specifically the genuine Torah Sages (as shall be clarified below in Chapter 21), but on the other hand is relevant *to at least some degree* to anyone who studies the Oral Law (as we'll clarify below in Chapters 9 and 14). And as we'll see in the next section, whereas the toil involved in *limud Torah* (discussed in the preceding section) has its relatively-generic effects that are relevant by effort put into *any mitzvah* (whereby the toil makes the acquired Godly-perfection more attributed to the person), the decision-making facet of *limud Torah SheBaal Peh* allows an individual to become similar to God in ways that are virtually not found in other context (either at all, or at least not to the same degree).

Section Three:

Playing a Role In the Decision-Making

Chapter 8

The Decision-Making Powers Of the Genuine Torah Sages

Introduction

Let's begin this section by examining an array of sources that discuss the fact that God gave over the decision-making of Torah to the genuine sages, to the extent that Hashem, *as it were*, Himself quotes the *chachamim*, and even follows their decisions. We'll divide these sources into three broad categories, as can be seen in the headings that appear below.

The Sages Are Given the Power to Decide What the Practical Law Will Be

“The Sages of Each Generation Shall Decide...”

It's not uncommon for people to think that the Rabbis only got heavily involved in deciding practical law in the second half of the Second Temple era, at which time historical circumstances led to a complete breakdown in the clarity of the oral tradition (as summarized in Chapter 17 below). But this is simply incorrect. The truth is that the Divine Will that the true sages play a role in deciding *halachic* matters was made known long before the breakdown-of-clarity that took place during the Second Temple era. In fact, this Godly intention was made clear **immediately** with the giving of the Torah. The source for this idea is the *Midrash Tehillim* (Chapter 12 – Paragraph 4; also paraphrased by the *Ritvah* in *Eiruvim* 13b on the Gemara of *Eilu v'Eilu*; see also a similar idea in the *Yerushalmi Sanhedrin* 4:2) which we quoted in Chapter 6 of *“Why do I Need to Learn Gemara?!”* For the sake of completion, we shall quote it again here, together with some basic clarifications regarding the *pshat* in this *midrash*:

For each idea which Hashem taught Moshe, He would tell him 49 reasons/facets (in the original Hebrew: פנים) why [a given item] should be pure (*tahor*) and 49 reasons/facets why [that item] should be impure (*tamei*). [Moshe] then asked Hashem: When will we gain clarity [as to the definitive verdict] in these matters? [Hashem responded:] The *halachah* will follow the majority. If the majority declares it impure, it will be impure, and if the majority declares it pure, it will be pure. (In the *Ritvah's nusach*, the *midrash* concludes: The matter shall be given over to the sages of each generation, and the final verdict shall follow their decision.)

In clarification of this *midrash*, I've heard it explained in the name of a number of contemporary *talmidei chachamim*, that certain parts of the oral tradition, such as *Halachah L'Moshe MiSinai*, were obviously given over as definitive clear-cut laws. However, the remaining topics were *indeed* transmitted in a multifaceted way, with the final *halachah* being dependent on the ruling of the majority of sages in the *Sanhedrin*. (One scholar pointed out (as a suggestion) that until the *Sanhedrin* – i.e. its biblical equivalent – was established, *Moshe Rabbeinu* was himself the entirety of “the Sages” in whose power it lay to decide between the different sides of an issue handed down in the oral tradition.)

It should be noted that although the multi-faceted nature of Torah – as well as the fact that God intended *right off the bat* to involve the Sages in decision making – is only known from this *midrash*, rabbinic authority itself is explicit in the Written Torah. Namely, that the Sages in fact have the authority to decide on the practical law in situations of doubt is explicit in the Torah in *Devarim* 17:8-11 (at the beginning of *parashas Shoftim*). Likewise, that the majority is to be followed in situations of dispute is explicit in *Shemos* 23:2 (in *parashas Mishpatim*).

In any event, let's now examine some of the numerous other sources that teach this idea that God, in many areas, put the job of decision-making-in-Torah-law into the hands of the Sages.

“Hashem Isn't Like a Regular Seller...”

The Gra (HaGaon **Rav Eliyahu** – the Vilna Gaon), in his commentary on *Shir HaShirim* (Song of Songs) 3:11 quotes the *midrash* which states: “God is not like man. When a person sells something to another, the seller is sad. But the Holy One, Blessed be He, gave the Torah to Yisrael, and He's happy about it.”

The Gra asks on this: The metaphor doesn't parallel reality, because a typical seller no longer has the item that he sold. In contrast, Hashem still has the Torah, to occupy Himself with it (as it were), *even after* His having given the Torah; and so there's in any event no reason for Him to be “sad” over giving away the Torah? The answer is, explains the Gra, that reality *is* like the metaphor, for now that the Torah was given to Man, it is the genuine sages who decide the law, and not God. *And as we'll see in the next section of this chapter*, this idea is so true, to the extent that God Himself quotes the sages! It follows that Hashem is indeed comparable to a seller who no longer possesses the item that he sold.

Daughter, Sister, and Mother

In the above source, the Gra makes the following additional insight regarding this matter.

Shir HaShirim 3:11 states: “Go out, O’ daughters of Tzion, and gaze upon King Solomon, **upon the crown with which his mother crowned him** on the day of his nuptials and on the day of the joy of his heart.” Regarding this, the Sages comment (in *Midrash Shir HaShirim Rabbah*, on this verse, *Os* 2):

“This is similar to a king who had an only daughter of whom he was very fond. He couldn’t stop loving her until he called her “my **daughter**,” as it says in *Tehillim* 45:11 “Hearken o’ daughter, and see.” He couldn’t stop loving her until he called her “my **sister**,” as it is said in *Shir HaShirim* 5:2 “Open for me, my sister, my beloved.” He couldn’t stop loving her until he called her “my **mother**” [as in the above verse].

As explained in the commentaries, it is the Jewish people who are compared here to a daughter, sister, and even mother of Hashem. But what is the content of these comparisons? The above source in the Gra explains that these refer to three states of a person who’s learning Torah. When one is studying from his rabbi, he’s like a baby **daughter** nursing from his mother. Afterwards, when he’s developed enough to no longer need a teacher, he then becomes a colleague of his rabbi, reminiscent of the relationship between a brother and **sister**, who *aren’t* in the giving-receiving type of relationship that a parent and child are in. Later on, the person develops even more, achieving the status of himself being a teacher. At this point, one is like a **mother** to his students. And, continues the Gra, when one is on that level, Hashem says over the law in his name (as we’ll see just below), and even Hashem calls him “mother.”

“Had He Brought Us Near to Har Sinai, But Not Given Us the Torah...”

In the *Pesach Haggadah*, in *Dayeinu*, it’s stated: “Had He brought us near Har Sinai, but not given us the Torah...” The question here is: Aren’t these the same? After all, we came to Har Sinai specifically to receive the Torah; and so what “giving us the Torah” can there be beyond that? I’ve heard it answered that the latter refers to the genuine Sages being given “ownership” over the Torah, in that the ability to decide on the halachah has been placed in their hands – the concept that has formed the central theme of this section of the chapter.

The Torah's Called on Someone's Name

Let us now relate one last source that's somewhat related to this matter (though it involves a different focus than the previous sources). *Tehillim* 1:2 states "For if in the *Torah of Hashem* is his desire, and in *his Torah* he toils day and night..." The Sages were bothered over the fact that the verse first refers to the Torah as "*Toras Hashem*" – God's Torah, but then it says "his Torah" in reference to the one that learns it. So who's the real "owner" of the Torah after all? The Sages (as quoted by Rashi on the above verse) answer: In the beginning the Torah's called "Hashem's," but after a person toils in it, it's *then* called his Torah. This idea is stated briefly in *Kiddushin* 32b (on the top), but the main source is *Midrash Tehillim* 1:16, which states:

Rav Yudan said: [The second part of] the *possuk* doesn't say "*Toras Hashem*," but rather "his Torah," for if you toil in it, it's called on your name. Such as the *mishnah* (teachings) of Rabi Chiya, the *mishnah* of Rabi Hoshiah, and the *mishnah* of Bar Kapra, and others like these. And why's it called on their name? Because they toiled in it. It can be proven that this is so, for the Torah is Hashem's, as it says (*Tehillim* 19:8) "The Torah of Hashem is perfect," [and yet] Moshe went up to heaven and was there forty days and forty nights, and he gave of himself completely to learn it – therefore it's called on his name, as it says (*Malachi* 3:22) "Remember the Torah of Moshe my servant."

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(See also the *Shlah* – Shnei Luchos HaBris, by Rav Yishayah HaLevi Horowitz – in *Maseches Shavuos*, *Neir Mitzvah* 33, who offers an additional insight into the current topic, in regards to the Torah being "immeasurable.")

Hashem Follows the Decisions of the Sages

Introduction to This and the Next Section

The Gemaras which we now want to quote are both focused on the same point, namely: when Hashem gave over certain parts of Torah to be decided upon by the Torah sages, He *really* gave it over to them. That is, this "transference of power" is so real, that even if Hashem were to reveal that the way He would weigh things out is different than the way that the Sages have decided, they should nevertheless follow *their* own opinion. The verse that is brought to support this is from *Devarim* 30:12, which states "לא בשמים היא" – "the Torah is not in heaven!"

“It’s Not in Heaven!”

The first Gemara which brings out this point is *Bava Metziah* 59b, where Rabi Eliezer (a lone opinion) and Rabi Yehoshua (representing the majority opinion) battle it out over whether or not a certain type of oven is capable of becoming ritually impure. Rabi Eliezer there calls upon Hashem to perform supernatural wonders in order to prove that he’s right. Despite that such heavenly signs indeed occur, Rabi Yehoshua ignores them, rising to his feet and exclaiming “It (the Torah) is not in Heaven!” That is, as the Gemara explains, the Torah was given to Man, and in it, it states that the law follows the majority of sages – period. In any case, following this event, one of the sages met *Eliyahu HaNavi* (Elijah the prophet), and he asked him: “What was Hashem doing at the time of this argument?” Eliyahu answered: He “smiled” and said “My sons have won against Me! My sons won against Me!” The implication is that Hashem was saying: “This is exactly how the Oral Torah is supposed to be – with the Sages fulfilling their role *even* contrary to heavenly signs!”

Rabbah’s Death

The second Gemara which clarifies this matter is also in *Bava Metziah*, this time on 86a. There it relates that Hashem was, as it were, studying the laws of *Nega’im* (a leprosy-like spiritual disease) with the Heavenly Academy, and concerning a particular issue, He decided one way, while the Heavenly Academy decided the other way. The Gemara then states that the Talmudic sage Rabba bar Nachmani – who was the foremost authority on the above topic – ***at the moment of death*** declared that his halachic opinion in that matter was like God’s. Now, the Rambam (Maimonides), in his halachic magnum-opus *Mishnah Torah*, decides like the Heavenly Academy. The *Kesef Mishnah* commentary on the Rambam explains that the Rambam based himself on the opinion of **the Sages** in the beginning of the 5th chapter of *maseches Nega’im*. But what about the opinion of Rabba bar Nachmani? Regarding this, the *Kesef Mishnah* explains that since his opinion was stated ***as he was dying and ascending to Heaven***, the rule of “the Torah is not in heaven!” is applied. And so among the earth-bound living *chachamim*, we are left with just the above-mentioned opinion of the Sages. We accordingly have here yet another instance of Hashem’s will being overridden by the Sages of the Oral Torah.

Hashem Quotes the Sages

“Rabi Eliezer My Son Says etc.”

Midrash Pesiktah Rabbasi 14:13 states: At the time that Moshe ascended to heaven [to receive the Torah], he heard the voice of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, Who was sitting and

studying the topic of *Parah Adumah* (the Red Heifer), and saying over the laws in the name of the sage that said it – “Eliezer my son says that an *eglah* is a calf in its first year, whereas *parah* refers to a cow in its second year” (a quote of the *mishnah* in *Parah* 1:1).

“Evyasar My Son Says etc., and Yonason My Son Says etc...”

Gittin 6b tells of a dispute between Rabi Evyasar and Rabi Yonasan concerning the *Pilegesh B’Giv’ah* incident (in *Shoftim* Chapters 19-21). In this context, the Gemara relates that Rabi Evyasar met *Eliyahu HaNavi* and asked him “What’s Hashem doing [now]?” He answered “He’s occupied with the topic of *Pilegesh B’Giv’ah*. “And what’s He saying?” He responded [that God was saying] “Evyasar My son says like this, and Yonasan My son says like that.” Although the Gemara continues to relate that both opinions had truth to them – hence that God reckoned with them both, we in any case have here another source in which Hashem quotes, as it were, the genuine Torah sages.

The Question

All of the above should more than suffice to clarify that it was God’s intent *from the beginning* that the genuine Sages should play a direct role in determining the proper understanding of the Torah and deciding what the practical law should be; hence that many parts of the Oral tradition were given *to begin with* in a multifaceted way. And this was all applicable *even before* the historical circumstances discussed below in Chapter 17 necessitated an even greater involvement on the part of the Sages. When the latter is in fact also taken into account, namely that God guided the historical and practical events of the Second Temple era and the subsequent period in such a way that required *even more* input of *Chazal* (*Chochmeinu Zichronam L’Berachah* – Our Sages of Blessed Memory) into the unfolding of the Oral Torah, then it becomes all the more clear that **God desired that Man play a significant role in the revelation of His Will into the world**. But we are still left with the question of “WHY?!” Why does Hashem want it to be this way?

Chapter 9

Actualizing Our *Tzelem Elokim*: Being a Decision-Making King Even in Regards to Torah

Why Did God Give Much of the Decision-Making In Torah Over to the Genuine Sages?

A basic understanding of this matter has already been provided in Chapter 6 of “*Why Do I Need to Learn Gemara?*” We’ll now repeat here the relevant piece, followed by an expansion of this point, and then in subsequent chapters of this section we’ll examine *additional reasons* why Hashem gave over the decision-making in Torah to the *Chachamim*.

A basic answer on this question is with the fundamental idea that was presented in Chapter 1 (based on *Derech Hashem*, Part I, Chapter 2); namely, that the key to getting close to God is **to be similar to Him**, which means both emulating His attributes, as well as doing so out of our own free will, so that the way we are *comes from ourselves* (rather than from an outside source), just as is the case concerning God.

Applying these ideas to the current topic, it may be suggested that God gave over much of the decision-making in Torah to the Sages *so that* they could have a greater opportunity to emulate the Godly quality of being a **decision-making-king**. But in order to appreciate this, we need to first *better* clarify the significance of free will within the larger scheme of things. That is, we find that God is called in the Torah a *melech*/king (see for example *Shemos* 15:18, *BaMidbar* 23:21, and *Devarim* 32:5). The Leshem explains (in *Sefer HaKlalim* 18:10:5, *Os* 20, *Ma’arechet HaBen*, Section 6, 6th paragraph), that the root word מִלְךְ essentially means “a decision maker.” And based on a famous comment of the Gra (Rav Eliyahu, the Vilna Gaon; see *Kol Eliyahu* on *parashas VaYeishev*), it may be added that a ***melech* is specifically one who makes good decisions**, for a leader who makes decisions that aren’t for the good of the people is a *mosheil*/dictator, and not a *melech*. It follows then that in giving Man free will and the ability to choose the right thing to do, so *besides* that this enhances one’s emulation of the ten Divine attributes (as discussed in Chapter 1, and as reviewed in the previous paragraph), it is *itself* a tremendous emulation of Hashem’s attribute of kingship. Indeed, in *Devarim* 30:19 *choosing good* is presented as a *mitzvah* in *and of itself*; and likewise in the classic volume *Shaarei Teshuvah* (The Gates of Repentance), in 3:17, *Rabbeinu Yonah* writes that choosing is *alone* a *ma’alah* (meritorious act). We furthermore find that the Maharal of Prague explains (in *Derech Chaim* on *Pirkei Avos* 3:14) that the idea of being a king is a key facet of being a *tzelem Elokim* – one created in the image of God. And if so, **making a good decision is, on its own, a major emulation of Hashem.**

Although the value of *choosing* applies to all positive-decision-making, the more crucial the context in which a decision is made, the more of an opportunity that one's decision-making-faculty has to be expressed and developed. As such, what more significant area could there be than *the finalization of Torah law*, which defines the manner in which Godliness is to be revealed and expressed in the world. And in order that the Sages be able to actualize their *tzelem Elokim* to the utmost, they've in fact been given the opportunity *to decide* what the final *halachah* should be; they've been given the chance *to decide* how Godliness is to be revealed and expressed in *Olam HaZeh*. Putting this together with our discussion in the previous paragraph, it follows that the Sages are truly "kings," for they express the attribute of *Malchus*/decision-making in the most crucial of areas. This idea is in fact explicit in the Gemara in *Gittin* 62a, which states (based on *Mishlei* 8:15) that the Rabbis are called "kings." Likewise, throughout Torah literature, when a sage served as *Rosh Yeshivah* (head of a Talmudic academy), the verb "*malach*"/*reigning* is used – another indication that the Sages are truly kings, as explained above.

“God” of the Lower Realm

If being a good-decision-maker is in fact a major emulation of God, whereby one is developing one's *tzelem Elokim* to the utmost, then it follows that a *tzaddik* who constantly exercises this quality of making righteous decisions is truly a Godly individual. This is verily what the Sages are teaching (see *Megillah* 18a, commenting on *Bereishis* 33:20) when they say that *Yaakov Avinu*, “the choicest of the forefathers,” was like a “god of the lower realm.” That is, he had actualized his *tzelem Elokim* to an unprecedented degree, and was accordingly an extension of God to the extent that such a title was deemed warranted.

It's interesting to note, in this context, that the Arizal teaches that the redactor of the *Mishnah*, Rabi Yehudah HaNasi – a sage that obviously embodied the above ideas – contained within himself a spark of *Yaakov Avinu*'s soul. This is hinted to by the title *הנשיא/HaNasi* (the prince) appended to his name, for this is actually an acronym for *הוא ניצוץ של יעקב אבינו* – “He is a spark of Yaakov, our forefather.”

A Qualification Concerning Hashem's Handing-Over of the Decision-Making to the Sages

In any event, putting the power of decision-making in Torah into the hands of the Sages is of course not without grave danger. After all, it leaves open the possibility that an unfit individual will illegitimately claim the right to decide *halachah*, when in fact this is

hardly from the case. Such a travesty can only be avoided if there's some type of guidelines that define who is and isn't considered a genuine Torah sage. Such guidelines indeed exist, and these will be dealt with below in Chapter 21 (see also Chapter 22).

At the same time, this qualification is ultimately primarily relevant to the realm of deciding practical law, as well as to the *definitive* clarification of teachings upon which the practical law will be based. Concerning these, if unscrupulous individuals – or even honest people who simply failed to put in the requisite effort – were allowed to decide what the *halachah l'maaseh* is, they might literally permit the forbidden and declare the impure to be pure. However, at the same time, ever since the historical breakdown of clarity in the oral tradition (which was touched upon in Chapter 2 above, and which will be dealt with at greater length in Section Four below), the essential ideas discussed above *are* relevant to *all* who study Torah *on some level*; for in this era of history, every stage of this *limud* involves the need *to decide* – on at least a smaller scale – how each item is to be properly understood. As such, in regards to a Torah-student's *simply attempting to understand the Torah properly* (whether in regards to the *Tana'im*, *Amora'im*, *Rishonim*, or *Achronim*), to the extent that the *lomeid Torah* is racking his brain to get to a Torah-true *pshat*, and he understands that a wrong *pshat* is a negative thing *even if* no one will act based on that misunderstanding, so to that extent his own decision-making faculty can also be expressed in regards to the most severe of topics – what's called a *mitzvah* and what's called an *aveirah*, and *he too* can develop the kingship-aspect of his *tzelem Elokim* through the above-described mechanics.

This point should be kept in mind throughout the remainder of this section. Namely, when we speak in the ensuing chapters about the various advantages of God's giving over the decision-making of *Torah SheBaal Peh* to Man, we're generally going to be focusing *not so much* on the deciding of practical law and on the *definitive* interpretation of those teachings upon which the practical law is based (which is indeed only relevant to the relatively few genuine sages and rabbis of a generation), but rather on *the broader facet of this topic*, whereby the Oral Torah is structured in such a way as to leave room for *all* who study it (in the honest pursuit of truth) to make "smaller scale" decisions about how one understands the various opinions expressed in the *Mishnah*, *Gemara*, *Rishonim*, *Achronim*, and *Poskim* – with this being more associated with the third role that Man plays in the Oral Torah (as per our discussion in Chapter 2 above); namely, clarifying the various facets of a topic altogether. This is in fact something which is relevant to any and all genuine students of the Torah (assuming that the *halachah l'maaseh* won't be based on such decisions).

Transition to the Upcoming Chapters

Whatever the case, the developing of one's quality of being a *melech* is just one reason that we can discern of why Hashem gave over the decision-making of Torah to Man. However, there are additional reasons, all of which are clearly relevant to anyone and everyone who learns *Torah SheBaal Peh* with the appropriate effort and intensions. It's to presenting these other approaches that the subsequent chapters will be dedicated. But before proceeding, a few words are in order concerning the source for what we'll see there.

There is an absolutely wonderful volume entitled *Bridging the Gap: Clarifying the Eternal Foundations of Mussar and Emunah for Today*, by **Rav Avi Fertig shlit"a**. In a number of places in his splendid volume, Rav Fertig discusses the great advantages for spiritual growth that result from that which a Torah-student has been given the opportunity to be a decision-maker (again, at least in a scaled-down sense) within his *limud Torah*. We shall present each of these in its own chapter – sometimes quoting Rav Fertig's original text, and at other times summarizing what he says in our own words. And considering that this book is not only out of print, but virtually impossible to find anywhere (even on-line), the urgency of presenting the insights-concerning-our-topic that are found there is all the more great.

In any event, **all the credit for the remaining chapters of this section goes completely to Rav Fertig.** And if you ever come across a copy of *Bridging the Gap* for sale, grab it at light speed; for whatever we'll be relating from that work is a tiny fraction of the endless insights that are found there.

Chapter 10

Becoming a Creator Through *Chiddushei Torah*

The idea that decision-making in the Oral Torah allows a person to emulate God's attribute of kingship was presented first in the current section of this booklet inasmuch as it's an approach that was already discussed in "*Why Do I Need to Learn Gemara?*" But the truth is that there's a more fundamental emulation of Hashem involved in determining the correct halachah etc. in *Torah SheBaal Peh*; namely, emulation of God **as a creator**. This is because in giving over to Man the privilege to be the decision-makers of Torah, it offers a person *the opportunity* to produce *chiddushei Torah* – **novel** interpretations of the Torah – be it in regards to the proper understanding of a *mishnah*, *Gemara*, *rishon*, or *achron*, or be it in regards to determining the practical halachah. That producing *chiddushei Torah* is in fact a creative act that emulates God's own quality of being a creator has been presented amazingly by Rav Fertig, and we shall now quote the relevant piece from *Bridging the Gap* (pp. 185-7; please note regarding the ensuing quote that there are points which Rav Fertig placed in the footnotes of his book which have been merged together with his regular text, *and* the order of some of the points has been changed, all in a manner which I felt would bring greater clarity to what he writes; any text which I added – as was necessitated by the above two editorial changes – has been placed in square brackets):

Let us attempt to penetrate this profound idea, by understanding the essence of creation.

The Ramban to *Bereishis* 1:1...writes that all of creation was brought into existence in one instance. Everything after that was the realization of this initial potential.

Let us [now] consider the most physically creative act that a human can accomplish – the birth of a child. This incredible feat requires both a father and a mother. Physically, the male contribution is infinitesimally small in space and time. It consists of passing on a genetic code and no more, with no work or pain whatsoever. The female's contribution is in marked contrast to this. The child forms physically within the mother, over a considerable period of time, and with much effort and pain. The miniscule male gift of his genetic code is crystallized into tangible form within the female's body. Finally, a child is born – both father and mother have melded into one in the newborn.

The Gemara (Bava Basra 74b) states: *All that Hashem created, He created male and female*. All creation imitates the above-outlined process. At the beginning there is always a brief but potent flash of inspiration – of pure energy. The true work of creation is the second phase.

Creation means to reveal the hidden, to realize the potential...Our involvement in creation is always the aspect of realizing potential, of bringing out that which is already there but not yet being fully expressed.

[In this context it can be understood that all human “creation” differs from Hashem’s initial act of creation. Namely,] only Hashem can create ex nihilo (something from nothing). [But in regards to any human “creation,” whatever the context,] the initial flash is [perforce] a “present” from Hashem. Our input truly begins with the second phase; [though even by humans, in regards to “creating a child,” there’s the conceptual parallel of “stage one” in the form of the male flash of potential energy. [In any event, to summarize this matter: whereas by Hashem, creation involved the creating of potential itself – which was then followed by the actualization of that potential, by people the main focus of “creating” is specifically the actualization of a potential given to us by God, fleshing it out until it’s fully expanded and expressed into reality.]

[The above clarifies why producing novel Torah insights is itself an act of creation.] One who has experienced the generation of a *chiddush* will appreciate this process. There is as sudden flash, an insight that clicked inside. It is a feeling as if the heavenly gates had briefly opened, a moment of intense pleasure. But almost as soon as it is realized, the clarity of the insight begins to fade. What remains is only an impression, a hint and a general direction; then begins the arduous task of bringing the *chiddush* to light, of working back to that initial point of clarity in order to make it real. When this is finally accomplished, the initial burst of pleasure transforms into real *simchah* – happiness, the deep joy of being creative. **This is the process of creation that allows man to resemble Hashem in the most profound way.**

At this point, Rav Fertig emphasizes that similar to the second stage of creation and the “creation” of the embryo in the mother’s womb, the main act of creation by *chiddushei Torah* is the actualization of a potential that Hashem placed within the *neshamah* in the form of that soul’s portion in Torah:

We were born with Torah within us [(see Chapter 7 above, quoting from Chapter 9 of “*Why Do I Need to Learn Gemara?*”). It is the natural inheritance of the Jewish nation. Each of us has our unique portion in Torah. It is inside of us; it is purely individual. It is a present from Hashem! Similar to a mother’s pain in the process of birth, the struggle of Torah study is the pain of bringing out what is already there in potential...

Each of us has our *cheilek* in Torah. Our task is to bring it out into the world – to reveal it so that all can see. Our job is to clarify and express Torah in the unique way that only each individual can do. It is the most creative process in the world...

Let’s conclude this matter by relating Rav Fertig’s quote of the Vilna Gaon (in *Sefer Keser Rosh*, by a student of Rav Chaim of Volozhin), in *Hilchos Talmud Torah* #56:

Chiddushei Torah is everything that is learned more, and clarified more within us. Each time one involves himself in the words of Torah, one discovers a deeper taste. And when one reviews what he has learned, he uncovers more reasons and explanations. That is what is called *chiddushei Torah*.

* * * * *

In the context of discussing how we emulate being a creator through *limud Torah*, this chapter has touched upon the fact that each person has a unique *cheilek* in Torah. But if so, it follows that Torah study also involves expressing one's individuality. The truth is that **being an individual** is *itself* an emulation of God, and thus this facet of *limud Torah* offers further insight into why Hashem has given the decision-making concerning much of the Torah over to Man, as we'll now expand upon in the next chapter.

Chapter 11

Becoming an Individual Through the Decision-Making Of Torah Study

God is an individual, to say the least. He is completely independent of anything outside Himself, determining His every move entirely from within – without anything exterior to Him in anyway dictating how He acts. And He gives full expression to His essence (as it's revealed within the creation). He is indeed the epitome of being an individual. As such, when a person expresses his own individuality, this alone emulates Hashem.

Returning to the topic of *limud Torah*, as we'll quote just below, Torah study involves a unique forum for the expression of one's individuality, in the context of expressing how one understands a given piece of Torah and/or what one thinks the practical law should be. But as with the issues discussed in the previous chapters, this particular way of manifesting one's individuality is only relevant inasmuch as God gave over the decision-making of much of the Torah to Man in the form of the genuine Torah sages and students. Accordingly, giving Man the ability to express his uniqueness in emulation of the independent and individualistic Creator offers further insight into why Hashem in fact put much of the Torah into the hands of Man.

Having given this overview of the point, let's now quote from Rav Fertig's excellent presentation of this matter (*Bridging the Gap*, pp. 139-143; emphasis in the original):

All learning takes place within us. We can be taught and explained anything...but understanding can only come from within...

If this is true of all knowledge, we need to discover what is unique about Torah knowledge (specifically Talmudic study) that demands a deeper level of internal struggle. Why does Torah study in particular nurture our inner world and develop our individuality? Why is independence more essential in the process of Torah study than in any other intellectual discipline?

Let us answer these questions by first asking some additional ones. What is the source of the powerful magnetism that Torah study exerts on those who engage in it?...Another question: Yeshivah study is a violent struggle between individuals. One person attempts to build a conceptual edifice, and his study partner tries to tear it down and erect his own structure, each striving mightily to uphold his understanding of the *sugyah*. What is the source for this

unusual component of Torah study? Answering these questions will help us to understand the points we originally raised...

[In contrast to other wisdoms, which are] inherently independent of the person studying it...the *chochmah* of Torah is intimately bound to the person studying it...The essence of *limud* ha'Torah lies in the connection each individual makes with what he is studying – hence the prevalence of the expression “it seems to me” in Torah study.

Where does this unique aspect of Torah study present itself? *Limud* ha'Torah exists on two distinct planes. The first step of study is to decipher the “raw material” of the *sugyah*. This includes clarifying what is being said, together with researching and determining the proper sources and underlying assumptions of the Gemara and *Rishonim*. (Often there are many “whys,” or reasons, provided in the primary sources. When this is the case, those reasons are part of the “what” of the *sugyah*, and belong to the first phase or plane of our learning.) In truth, this first stage applies to all *chochmos*. At this level there's no room for the unique contribution of the individual. In this phase of study, many questions should arise, for example, when two things appear to be contradictory. Clarifying what is unclear is an essential component of this plane.

After all this information is clear [(or it's at least clear what's unclear!)], the second phase can begin. In this stage, individual input is necessary: a person must dig deep into himself and pull out the storehouses of Torah wisdom that exist within [(as explained in Chapter 9 of “*Why Do I Need to Learn Gemara?*”)]. We have to discover **why** the assumptions were made. We must choose which side of the apparent contradiction must be “bent” to fit in with the *sugyah*, and which apparent difficulty holds the key to understanding it. In doing so, we may find a connection to another, seemingly unrelated *sugyah* – and our study partner may vehemently disagree with our analysis. Still deeper, we must use our *sevarah* (line of reasoning) to determine the *yesod* (foundation) that the *sugyah* is built on; that single point that can only be discovered after all else is clear, and even then, *only realized from within!*

The **necessity** for *amkus* (depth) is the source of the powerful magnetism that exists in Torah study...[But] *amkus*...[only] begins *after* we have the facts. In this [second] phase of study, *nothing* is clear. *It depends on each and every one of us, and varies from individual to individual.*

Lest the reader protest, that our categorization is too sweeping and this depth applies in areas outside of Torah as well, let us note that this is indeed true. **However**, there is one great, unbridgeable, difference: in other *chochmos* only select individuals attain it. In contrast, Torah study *demand*s this depth...The strength of Torah is based on the individual who is studying it – on the depth *he* reaches in *his* study. When the individual feels that he has discovered the foundation of the *sugyah*, or he reveals that his idea is connected to more and more places, his depth of understanding is infinitely greater. Such clarity cannot be easily shaken...It is in this place where our study is alive, and it is this independence that Torah

study demands. (FOOTNOTE: Many beginning students are troubled by the strange way that the Gemara presents information. As the student grows, he begins to see how the Talmudic style draws him into the study. The unique style of Gemara study forces the student to become part of the process. He is forced to use his individual *kochos* when studying. One who has experienced true Torah study knows that it draws him in and activates his most individual abilities...)

The Torah mentor must first teach his students how to decipher the raw material of the *sugyah*. Successful Torah study requires strict logic, a sharp memory, and painstaking attention to detail. However, the teacher must also nurture his students' independence and individuality. They must be taught how to dig deep within *themselves* and formulate their own opinions, how to use their own *sevarah* to gain an understanding of the *sugyah*. Certainly watching the rebbi engage in true *amkus* is a valuable tool in achieving this goal. However, the rebbi whose students think is always right **is no rebbi!** A good educator will encourage his charges to challenge what he says. *Chazal (Bava Metziah 84a)* tell us that the hallmark of a good teacher is enjoying a difficulty raised on his assertion more than a proof offered in support of it. One who has had the privilege of having a true teacher will know this to be true.

The reader is reminded in this context of the preceding discussion that Torah interpretation is not a free for all. This matter was discussed in detail in Chapter 9 of "*Why Do I Need to Learn Gemara?*", much of which is reviewed in Chapter 21 below, in the current work.

In any event, let's now examine additional gains that emerge from that which the decision-making of Torah has been given over to the genuine students and sages of the Oral Torah.

Chapter 12

Building *Seichel*

In the Battle Against Unrestrained Imagination

In Chapter 26 of *Bridging the Gap* (pp. 333-4), Rav Fertig notes that another fundamental benefit of Torah study is the way it builds up the *seichel* (intellect) in the battle against unrestrained use of *dimyon* (imagination) – which is in turn the foundation for achieving numerous spiritual goals (as will be discussed in the quotations below). Though, here too, it's only because the *lomeid Torah* was given the opportunity to be a decision-maker in Torah – in which context the *seichel* is thoroughly exercised – that makes Torah study such a *seichel*-builder; hence that the building up of *seichel* over *dimyon* can be seen as an additional reason why God put the decision-making of the Oral Torah into the hands of Man.

We'll first quote Rav Fertig's explanation concerning the crucial role that *seichel* plays in *avodas Hashem*, followed by what he writes in regards to the role of Torah study in the building of *seichel* (emphasis is in the original). (Note: The original quote also involves a thorough discussion concerning how *limud Mussar* likewise builds the *seichel*. But inasmuch as that's beyond the scope of the current work, we've left that out below; and the text has accordingly been slightly edited in order that it remain a smooth read notwithstanding our deletions.)

Seichel is much more than simply the intellect...The essence of the *Tzelem Elokim* (Man's being created in the image of God) is the *seichel*. The *seichel* is the medium, more than any other human faculty, through which Man connects with Hashem. And we saw that the *seichel* is the agent of truth and consistency and **our key to reality**. Our responsibility is that it be the guiding force of our lives so that we can control and direct our *dimyon*.

Rav Yisrael [Salanter] presents us with the struggle between *dimyon* and *seichel*. Only the *seichel* will allow Man to live in the true reality; to seek truth, morality, and ultimately his Creator. But our *seichel* is weak. In the physical realm, the *dimyon* is in control. The *seichel* must constantly be strengthened – it must be freed from the grip of the *dimyon* – if it is to be our guide through life in helping us achieve a true connection with reality.

Further along the *Igeres HaMussar*, Rav Yisrael presents... [a] basic strategy for building *seichel*: deep and intense Torah learning. Let's briefly discuss this basic aspect of *avodas Hashem* and see how it's used to build the *seichel*...

Deep and intense Torah study demands strict logic and a painstaking attention to detail. Learning Gemara, specifically, intensely and deeply, requires one to rigidly decipher each

sugyah as it slowly unfolds through much toil and effort. This is the realm of the *seichel*. Torah study provides a *complete world of seichel*. The effort expended in Torah learning is the most powerful *seichel*-building tool available.

One who is intensely involved in Torah learning naturally feels restrained from his base urges. He feels strongly bound to what he learns. The more Torah one acquires, the more he feels bound by that Torah. Sin gives us the feeling of no restraint. But as a result, it brings with it a feeling of having no roots. Torah study creates the exact opposite. The more one learns the more rooted one feels. This is the sign of the *seichel*. It is the sign of one who has entered the true reality.

The Gemara relates the great Talmudic sage, Rav, never looked outside his four *amos*. The great *Baalei Mussar* trained themselves never to look where it was unnecessary. Students recount that the Alter of Kelm never moved his eyes from side to side; he always looked straight ahead. This absolute restraint is a sign of one who lives completely under the control of his *seichel*. We may be far from these spiritual giants, but anyone who has seriously tasted Torah study feels some restraint, and some feeling of deep roots. The more one is involved in intense Torah learning, the more he feels his *seichel* expand, allowing it to become his true guide in life.

Bava Basra 16a teaches: *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* created the yeitzer ha'rah, and he created the Torah as the spice that can direct and control it. Rashi comments: *It is the spice that nullifies the fantasies of sin*. Torah controls the *dimyon*. One who is deeply rooted in Torah study, and distances his mind from foreign-based illusions, has the power within him to control the *dimyon*, and ultimately use it to enhance his *avodah*.

Only the *seichel* provides the clarity that evil is essentially non-reality. Man's task is to realize that what seems like the option between good and bad is essentially between truth and false. What appears like something that will bring pleasure and fulfillment, will actually bring a feeling of emptiness and disappointment. This is the depth of the Rambam who admonishes us at the end of his laws concerning illicit relationships (*Hilchos Issurei Bi'ah* 22:21): "Greater than this (than all other advices) our sages say (in *Kiddushin* 30b): one should turn himself and his thoughts to the words of Torah; he should expand his mind with wisdom, for illicit thoughts only overcome one whose heart is empty of wisdom." [And] *Alei Shur* (Volume I, pg. 187; by Rav Shlomo Wolbe *zatzal*) sums it up this way: "There is no healthier man on earth than the one who toils in Torah, for only he is free from *dimyon*; only he can live in reality."

* * * * *

Let's now move on to a new facet of that which is gained from the fact that the decision-making of Torah was given over to Man: the greatness achieved by grappling with the opposing sides of a topic.

Chapter 13

Growing From the Tension Of Opposing Sides of an Issue

Introduction to This Chapter

Another idea that Rav Fertig discusses a number of times is the spiritual-growth that results from tension surrounding opposing sides of an issue. It would seem to me that this too is quite relevant to the current topic. As such, let's first discuss the general idea, and then see how it might relate to this section of the present volume.

Think Twice!

Rav Fertig notes (in Chapter 5 of his work) that one of Rav Yisrael Salanter's goals in encouraging *mussar* study was to train a person to think twice before acting, thereby opening the door to the possibility that a person will act according to the truths that one knows, rather than according to one's natural tendencies, which are often blind to the truths that they know in the mind. Indeed, Torah growth isn't possible without following the *seichel* over one's inclinations, and following the intellect is a skill that needs to be nurtured and developed.

One of the ways that this quality is developed is by confronting the tension resulting from two varying options, concerning which a decision has to be made. As Rav Fertig writes (pp. 77-78):

Grasping the rope from both ends is what builds man. Greatness is developed through struggle. Obviously, only one of the options will ultimately be chosen and followed. However, it is not the clarity of the final decision that builds us, but the inner tension generated by having to choose between the various options. It is through the constant struggle that potential is actualized... True greatness lies within the space that exists between opposing forces...

This idea is poignantly illustrated by the following story. In his youth, HaRav Yitzchak Ruderman (founder of *Yeshivas Ner Yisrael* in Baltimore) studied in the Slabodka Yeshivah [in Lithuania]. The young Reb Yitzchak saved up the little money he had so he could perform the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis* in the best possible fashion. In particular, he longed to be able to afford a pair of woolen *tzitzis*, the optimal way in which to fulfill this commandment. Penny by penny he saved up, until at last, he had enough money to buy the object of his desire. Returning to the yeshivah after making his purchase, he encountered to Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Nosson Tzvi

Finkel, the famed Alter (Elder) of Slabodka. Young Yitzchak excitedly told his Rebbe how he had carefully saved up his money for so long in order to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis* in the most optimal manner. The Alter responded that perhaps it would have been more appropriate for him to have purchased cheaper cotton *tzitzis* and donated the difference to *tzedakah*. Understandably, the youth was crestfallen at this unexpected response. The Alter's son-in-law (and *mashgiach* of the yeshivah) HaRav Isaac Sherer, who saw what happened, approached Reb Yitzchak and told him to not take the Alter's response too personally, explaining, 'If you would have indeed purchased cotton *tzitzis* and given the rest to *tzedakah*, he would've asked you why you didn't purchase wool *tzitzis*!'

The Alter's overriding goal was to guide each of his students to greatness. He purposely "broke his young student's heart" by presenting him with the tension of the options. He was teaching him that the path to greatness lies not in the final decision, but in the struggle between two options.

Greatness demands that we learn to appreciate this tension. By nurturing the inner conflicts within us, we will begin to express our individuality. Slowly, we will develop into thinking people who are in total control of ourselves. As this happens, our actions will start to be guided by our *seichel* instead of our natural tendencies. As a result, we will begin to grow in all areas of life. This is the Torah's path to greatness."

On pp. 82-86, Rav Fertig develops this idea within the specific context of Torah study, noting that *limud Torah* requires one to remain firm in one's opinion, while at the same time being open to what others are saying – once again "grasping the rope from both ends." Though, it would appear to in any event be relevant to *limud Torah*, considering that Talmudic study is forever presenting the student with opposite sides of an issue, concerning which he has to constantly attempt to understand the validity of each one.

Decision Making in Torah – Revisited

Returning to our current topic of: why is it that Hashem gave over to Man a key role in the decision-making of Torah, the answer that emerges from the preceding discussion is because the very tension of having to make decisions regarding the many contrasting facets of a topic is *alone* a central means to achieving greatness *avodas Hashem* through the development of one's intellect and individuality that this engenders (though, as we saw in the previous two chapters, Torah study can contribute to these two areas directly, even without the specific context of "the tension of opposing sides of an issue"). And if this is also true in regards to the tension-of-decision-making in even mundane areas, then all the more so in regards to decisions in halachah, an area whose significance only creates that much more tension. After all, deciding the manner in which Godliness will be revealed and expressed in the world demands the utmost honesty and responsibility considering the severity of an *avoidable* error, should it be made.

Chapter 14

Acquiring *Daas Torah* Through In-Depth Torah Study

As we've seen again and again, it's because the decision-making of the Oral Torah was given over to Man that allows for a degree of in-depth study that wouldn't be relevant if *limud Torah SheBaal Peh* was nothing more than memorizing preexisting laws. In the current chapter we wish to examine another fundamental spiritual accomplishment which is made possible through *limud b'iyun* (in depth learning): the acquisition of *Daas Torah*. To clarify this matter, we once again turn to Rav Fertig's outstanding presentation of this topic in **Chapter 10 of *Bridging the Gap* (pp. 145-152)**:

We have all heard of *Daas Torah*. Let us clarify what this phrase means by discovering the connection that Torah must have with our inner world...

Daas means connection. The ability to connect disparate parts lies in this faculty. Everything in our world is a combination of physical and spiritual...What connects these two opposite dimensions is *Daas*.

Daas Torah is when Torah knowledge penetrates our inner world; when we've internalized something so intimately that it becomes our reality and the world we live in... Intimate knowledge [in turn] is knowledge that connects every part of my being. Man is comprised of several dualisms: body and soul, mind and emotions, and *seichel* and *middos*. When Torah penetrates our entire being, when not just our *seichel*, but also our *middos* are formed by Torah, when our Torah is expressed by our actions – then we know that it has penetrated our true self...

How can we hope to have Torah form our personal reality? How can we attain a level of *Daas Torah*? In numerous places, Rav Yisrael [Salanter] writes that studying halachah *b'iyun* (in depth) is an essential method for allowing Torah to penetrate our essence and become real to us. Researching a *sugyah* and delving into its many layers drives Torah deep within us...

Torah requires that one develop a strong sense of subservience to its laws. Without this, they will never become second nature to us. *Mussar* study and unwavering observance of halachah in all its minutia is necessary if we are to grow in this area. But the essential tool, the most powerful force, is deep, intense *limud ha'Torah*. *Daas Torah* is impossible without it. The *Chazon Ish* writes (*Emunah U'Bitachon*, Chapter 3) that such *limud ha'Torah* will not only cause a reverence for the particular halachah that one is studying, but will also cause a general subservience in all areas of Torah. Our natural state is not subservience to halachah. Our natural worldview does not begin with Torah. We must do the work. We must form ourselves through Torah.

In explanation of why in-depth study in fact causes Torah to penetrate our inner selves, Rav Fertig offers the following suggestions (in footnote 215):

Perhaps it is because in-depth study activates the *seichel* and sensitizes it to the *mitzvah* we are learning about. Additionally, just as with *Limud HaMussar*, the real-life situations we picture will foster sensitivity to what we study. Moreover, the idea that we mention...from the Chazon Ish – that learning causes a reverence for halachah – is certainly applicable here.

In any event, let's conclude this chapter with an additional quote from Rav Fertig concerning the *Daas Torah* that can be acquired through *limud b'iyun*.

Torah is a complete world, a complete reality. *Daas Torah* is when we connect with this world in the deepest sense, when it becomes our world, where everything we see and think is based in Torah. When we see someone riding on a magnificent horse, do we fantasize about sitting in his place with soaring pride, galloping on a steed with the wind rushing in our face, or do we immediately consider whether riding is halachically considered to be standing still or moving? Do we daydream about racing the Kentucky Derby, or do we consider whether the horse has the status of a “moving domain” (*chatzer ma'haleches*)? One who truly entered the world of Torah will see everything through its lens. It becomes his inner reality, his entire being.

The scholar who is totally immersed in Torah is not oblivious to his surroundings. However, everything around him is a source for Torah thought! It is his entire world. Achieving this state is our task. It is the path to *Daas Torah*.

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For further discussion about the spiritual gains of in-depth Torah study – particularly in regards to the closeness-to-Hashem that it engenders, see pp. 175-181 of *Bridging the Gap*.

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Inasmuch as decisions regarding actual practical law, and whatever teachings are relevant to the actual law, are the domain of the true sages – and *only* the true sages, it's important to reemphasize a point that was already made in Chapter 9 above. Namely, that notwithstanding what was just stated, still, the core ideas of the preceding chapters are ultimately relevant to *all* genuine students of the Oral Torah. For the inherent ambiguity of the texts of *Torah SheBaal Peh* (ever since the point in history when such texts existed) in any event requires much thought on the part of the *lomeid Torah* as to what the correct understanding of the text is. As such, the numerous benefits that come to a person who toils in the Oral Torah – as delineated in the preceding chapters – are ultimately relevant to *all* honest students of Torah, each person within his own context, even if the deciding of definitive halachah and related decisions are in the hands of a relatively small few who are actually fit to decide practical law.

Chapter 15

Why's the Gemara Seem to Be Such a Big Mess? – Revisited

In Chapter 15 of “Why Do I Need to Learn Gemara?!”, we raised the obvious question: Why's the Gemara seem to be such a big mess? We in turn broke down this general difficulty into three specific points:

- **Firstly**, the Gemara seems to forever be jumping from topic to topic in its attempt to clarify an issue.
- **Secondly**, the words of the Gemara (and its commentaries) seem to always have this inherent ambiguity. So even if multiple interpretations have validity (as discussed in Chapter 11 of that work), why didn't everyone just speak more clearly to begin with?
- **And lastly**, the Gemara was set up in such a way that all the information relevant to a specific topic is NOT all found in one place, but is rather scattered all over *Shas*. Why couldn't this information just be put together in “one address?” And keep in mind, inasmuch as we have established that Hashem is the ultimate author of *Shas*, there is surely great significance for the fact that the Gemara is the way that it is.

Regarding the first point, we explained that this is a manifestation of the oneness of Torah. Concerning the second point, we noted the many benefits of learning from a teacher – which is a virtual must in regards to the Oral Torah considering the difficulty involved in understanding the terse texts of the *Torah SheBaal Peh*. However, both regarding the second question, as well as concerning the third, we touched upon **the benefits of having to toil through ambiguous texts and of having to labor to put together related ideas that don't appear in one place**. At the time, we said that we'd leave *the explanation* of these benefits for the current volume. And after all that we've learned in this booklet until now, we're indeed in a position to understand this matter.

As we've seen, we were created to acquire Godly *shleimus* **on our own**, rather than be handed it on a silver platter. That way, we emulate God, whose nature and perfection is completely from within, rather than being programmed from an outside source; and though this emulation, one can achieve a greater face-to-face/heart-to-heart connection with Hashem, which in turn allows for a greater degree of *dveikus* with Hashem. Using this idea, we explained in Section Two of the current work the general need to toil in Torah. We've further seen that the human-decision-making aspect of the Oral Torah allows a person to 1) develop the kingship-quality of his *tzelem Elokim*, 2) become a quasi-creator, 3) develop one's *seichel* against the onslaught of the *dimyon* (imagination),

4) achieve the greatness that emerges from dealing with the two opposite sides of an issue, and 5) to acquire *Daas Torah*.

But the truth is that just as these ideas explain these facets of the Oral Torah in general, so too they explain the facets **of the Gemara** that demand toil and putting things together on the part of the student. For this aspect of Gemara is nothing more than *an extension* of that which the Oral Torah was *all along* set up to allow for the fulfillment of the above concepts. Accordingly it would appear that those who established and edited the *Talmud Bavli* had in mind to present the information in such a way that would *maintain* the need for effort etc. *so that* these facets of *Torah SheBaal Peh* – and all their attendant spiritual benefits – would continue within the *Talmud* that they were putting together.

* * * * *

Thus concludes our initial discussion of the different levels whereby Man plays a role in the Oral Torah; namely, in regards to the general need for effort in order to understand and retain *Torah SheBaal Peh*, and that which the genuine Torah sages and students were given the opportunity to play a role in the decision-making of Torah – *each person in the way that's appropriate for him, given his level of Torah scholarship*. And as we've seen, the latter itself breaks down to two subtopics: 1) weighing out clear-cut facets of an issue to decide what the practical law should be, and 2) clarifying what the facets of a topic are altogether – which, as touched upon in Chapter 2 above, only became relevant once historical circumstances led to a breakdown in the clarity that had previously existed within the oral tradition (see Chapter 17 below for the details of the relevant history).

However, this last point – the historical process that led to a shifting in the role of the sages and students of *Torah SheBaal Peh* – itself begs an explanation, as well now clarify in the introduction to the next section.

Section *Four*:

Rising to The Challenge Of Fading Clarity

Chapter 16

Introduction to This Section

The Question

In Chapter 15 of “*Why do I Need to Learn Gemara?!?*”, as well as in Chapter 15 above, we dealt with the issue of why the Gemara seems to be such a big mess. But the truth is that **there is a much larger question here**. After all, **hundreds of years** before Rav Ashi and Ravina sat down to organize the *Talmud Bavli*, **historical processes and their attendant consequences, along with other practical issues, were *already* causing a breakdown of clarity in the oral transmission**. Whether in the loss of *halachos*, the novelty of **two** (rather than one) leading sages receiving the oral tradition from the previous generation (i.e. the *Zugos*-Pairs mentioned in Chapter One of *Pirkei Avos*), Greek oppression, or the Roman abolition of the Sanhedrin, it would seem that **throughout the Second Temple Era, the Divine Hand was guiding events towards a major shattering of the clarity which had once existed regarding the detailed laws contained in the Oral Torah**.

If we take a look at the starting and end points of this transition, the difficulty which arises here can be summed up as follows: When we ponder the *Torah-SheBaal-Peh* / Oral-Torah that was brought down by Moshe on Mt. Sinai, in contrast to the *Torah-SheBaal-Peh* that we have today (and for the last 2400-or-so years), it would seem that they are **as different as night and day!** Whereas the former was clear cut laws – *albeit oral*, the latter is pretty much *a pile of ambiguity* – a million details that seem to be able to be understood in a million different ways! This begs the question: **Why did Hashem let things get so messy?!** That is, inasmuch as this metamorphosis was the direct result of Divinely-guided historical events (as discussed in the previous paragraph), God obviously wanted things to get this way. But why? Simply to make things more fun (or difficult – it depends whom you ask) for us? Is there something deeper going on here? What’s the meaning of all this?

It should be emphasized that all the benefits associated with decision-making-in-Torah that were discussed in the previous section will not suffice to answer this question. After all, all of those benefits would be fulfilled even if the only thing a sage needed to do was to decide between preexisting clear-cut facets of a topic, seeing as this alone requires much toil, as well as the other points discussed above. As such, we’re still left with the question as to why God guided history in such a way that there’d eventually be a need for those who learn Torah to clarify what the content of the oral tradition is *altogether*.

The Game-plan

Before attempting to answer this question, let's first get background into the details of the historical processes that in fact led to the eventual total breakdown of clarity in the very content of the *Torah SheBaal Peh*. The truth is that this matter is entirely intertwined with the historical making of *machlokes* (Talmudic disputes), for the very circumstances that led to fuzziness in the oral tradition are the same ones that led to a proliferation of *machlokes* as Jewish history unfolded in the Second Temple Era and beyond.

Let's accordingly examine exactly what those circumstances were. The most comprehensive work on this subject (at least in English) is unquestionably *The Dynamics of Dispute: The Makings of Machlokes in Talmudic Times*, by Rav Tzvi Lampel. Unless indicated otherwise, that excellent volume is the source of what appears below in the following chapter. Regarding the practical causes of halachic disputes, Rav Lampel offers a number of approaches, but I want to focus on the specific two that would appear to me to have been the most common causes of *machlokes*.

Chapter 17

The Historical Makings of *Machlokes*

How Did *Machlokes* Ever Get Off the Ground?

In Chapter 2 of his work, Rav Lampel notes that the existence of halachic disputes isn't just something that's interesting to examine. It's rather *outright strange* considering that the points regarding which there would eventually be disputes were unquestionably known to earlier generations. The Jews in the desert, for example, did nothing but learn, and so even if a given *halachah* wasn't relevant to them on a practical level, they would've still learned about it. Furthermore, as the future generations unfolded, it's reasonable to assume that most issues *actually* did come up. As such, what happened to that knowledge, thus allowing for *machlokes*?

Approach One: Halachos Were Lost or Forgotten

As expanded upon in Chapters 3 and 4 of *The Dynamics of Dispute*, the most practical answer as to what happened to all that previous knowledge is that a significant amount of it was lost or forgotten. This general idea is stated in Rashi (*Succah* 25a) in regards to that which the Gemara there relates that Rabi Yochanan ben Zakai knew the הויות אביי ורבא (questions which the Talmudic sages Abayei and Rava would grapple with). On this Rashi comments: ובימי אמוראים נשתכחו – in the days of the *Amora'im* these were forgotten – hence the need for Abayei and Rava to clarify those issues once again. Likewise, Rashi to *Eiruvim* 21b states that laws that were given to Moshe were forgotten because of מיעוט – “a diminishing of the heart,” i.e. of understanding. Even a sage as great as Yehoshua – the prime disciple of *Moshe Rabbeinu* – is described as forgetting 300 *halachos*, and becoming doubtful in another 700 as a consequence of his telling Moshe that he already knew every *halachah* that Moshe had to teach him (*Temurah* 16a). We additionally find forgetting even concerning a *Halachah L'Moshe MiSinai* – regarding a חטאת שמתו בעליה (Temurah 16a). Likewise, the thirteen rules of Torah exegesis taught by Rabi Yishmael are themselves the subject of *machlokes*, despite being *Halachah L'Moshe MiSinai*.

Though, the obvious question in connection with this idea is: *what happened* that led to these *halachos* in fact being forgotten? Rav Lampel notes three primary causes;

- Hard times and periods of mourning, as can be seen from *Temurah* 15b/16a.

- A *takanah* was enacted for a particular situation (such as the decree that *havdalah* be recited in *Shemonah Esrei*, rather than on wine, which was decreed in a period of poverty), subsequently become not-practical in a given era of history (such as in a period of wealth, when it was decreed that *havdalah* should once again be recited on wine), and then years later, when the initial situation occurred again, and there arose a need to return to the original enactment, by that time the specifics of the *takanah* were forgotten (hence that in *Berachos* 33a there's a dispute concerning in which *berachah* of *Shemonah Esrei havdalah's* recited in).
- A *certain detail* of a general law was not particularly relevant on a practical level. As Rav Lampel notes, this approach is implied by Tosafos to *Berachos* 22b who says that only regarding daily (or weekly) *halachos* does the Gemara expect it to not be forgotten. One of the topics in the first *mishnah* in *Shas* is a good example of this – the latest time for reciting *Keri'as Shema* at night: everyone always said it at night, and the specific issue of “the official latest time,” with the passage of time, became forgotten. In this context, it should be noted that even people who don't know *halachah* in a detailed way can still keep *halachah* decently-well through general knowledge, via avoiding the “halachic edges/borderlines” of the various *halachos*.

In connection with this first approach to the causes of *machlokes*, it's necessary to clarify how these explanations fit in with various statements of the Rambam concerning the suggestion that halachic disputes were a consequence of forgetfulness. However, this matter is beyond the scope of the current volume, and the interested reader is directed to Rav Lampel's outstanding treatment of this topic in Chapter 4 of *The Dynamics of Dispute*. Suffice it to say for now that with a proper understanding of the Rambam, one will see that what he says in no way contradicts any of the above.

In Chapter 9 of his work, Rav Lampel notes that within a given Talmudic era, it *was* acceptable for a student to dispute his teacher; this then would've been an additional cause of *machlokes*. However, inasmuch as such a dispute would've only been relevant after the original tradition was lost or forgotten, this point can be seen as an appendix to this first approach, rather than as a different approach. (See *The Dynamics of Dispute* pg. 179 for a summary regarding this matter.)

Approach Two: *Machlokes* as a Result of the Brevity of the Teacher

This approach appears in Chapter 8 of *The Dynamics of Dispute*, where Rav Lampel explains as follows. The Gemara in *Pesachim* 3b and *Chullin* 63b teaches that לעולם ישנה

אדם לתלמידו דרך קצרה – one should always teach his student in a succinct manner. The purpose of doing so was:

- To save time when teaching
- To facilitate quicker manipulation of the facts by the listener, thereby making for more efficient thinking
- **Most importantly**, to hone the minds of the students. Learning how to arrive at Torah-true conclusions was considered so important, that sometimes teachers would even purposely relate wrong information in order to test their students (להודד בו את ; התלמידים; obviously afterwards, they would clarify what the correct version was).

Although brevity comes with its risks, these risks were considered worth taking in order to achieve the above goals. In any case, if the student didn't understand, he was expected to ask the teacher for clarification.

Notwithstanding the merits of these teaching methods, if the teacher thought he was understood, and the disciples thought that they understood – when in fact this was not the case – with the teacher's real intention remaining unclarified in his lifetime, there would be a break in the precision of the transmission, and an enduring *machlokes* could emerge from such a situation.

Here too, clarification is needed regarding how this approach fits in with specific statements of the Rambam, and the interested reader is directed to Chapter 7 of *The Dynamics of Dispute* for a thorough discussion of this matter.

Even if There WAS Indeed ROOM for a *Machlokes*, STILL, Why Wasn't the Matter Decided by the Majority?!

Having related two key approaches in regards to how there was even room for halachic dispute to ever arise, a crucial question still remains. Namely: even if there was an opportunity for a *machlokes* to begin, why did it ever last?! After all, we learn from *Shemos* 23:2 that all halachic doubts should be voted upon by the Sages, and whatever the majority decides becomes the definitive *halachah*. As such, how did halachic disputes ever become so enduring? Why weren't these matters decided by the majority? This question is the subject of Chapter 10 of *The Dynamics of Dispute*, which we will now attempt to summarize.

Rav Lampel notes that the above-question's assumption that the majority's decision carries weight *under all circumstances* is altogether **erroneous**. A key source on this point is the Ramban's comments (in his commentary on the Rambam's *Sefer HaMitzvos, Shoresh Rishon*, quoted in *The Dynamics of Dispute*, pg. 184), which were made in regards to the second *mishnah* in *maseches Horayos*. The *mishnah* there discusses the sacrifices which must be brought by a sage who follows the *Sanhedrin* even though he knows that they've erred. The Ramban was bothered: why does this individual need atonement for following the *Sanhedrin*?! Isn't a person supposed to follow the majority opinion of the *Sanhedrin* under all circumstances? The Ramban's surprising answer on this is: no – one in fact is *not* always supposed to follow the *Sanhedrin*'s decisions.

The Ramban explains the guideline as follows. Once someone's opinion has been presented to the *Sanhedrin*, and rejected, then he must indeed nullify himself to the majority. **However**, if one's opinion hasn't yet been presented, and he feels that with its presentation it would be accepted, he is for the time being permitted (and regarding a stringency – obligated) to follow his own opinion against the majority.

Now, under normal circumstances (as far as the *Sanhedrin* holding sessions goes), this situation didn't last very long, and so there were never sustained disputes as a result of the above guideline. **HOWEVER, persecution, in combination with the above halachah**, eventually led to increased and sustained disputes, for a number of reasons. Firstly, the inability to study with the concentration possible in peacetime led to a greater disparity of thinking. Furthermore, persecution prevented regular sessions of the *Sanhedrin* with its attendant voting. This is why the dispute between the *Yossi be Yo'ezer Ish Tzreidah* and *Yossi ben Yochanan Ish Yerushalayim* mentioned in the *mishnah* in *Chagigah 2:2* persisted through five generations of Sages, as related in that *mishnah*. (Rav Tzvi Hirsch Chayus indeed emphasizes that when the commentaries state that the above *machlokes* was the first one ever, they mean that it was the first ever **persistent machlokes**.) And then, to make matters worse, the *Sanhedrin* was abolished in the year 3704. Although re-legalized in 3712, continued interference from the *Tzaddokim* (Sadducees), Christians, and Herod, *made regular Sanhedric procedure impossible*. It was at this time that *Beis Shammai* and *Beis Hillel* developed their separate schools, generally not even having the opportunity to meet and vote, until the famous meeting in the attic of Chananyah ben Chizkiyah ben Goryone, as related in the *mishnah* in *Shabbos 1:4*. Although the arrival of the Sages in Yavneh indeed brought an end to many long-lasting disputes, particularly with the decision to follow *Beis Hillel* over *Beis Shammai*, the above historical processes certainly shook up the smoothness of the oral transmission, leaving the Jewish people with numerous enduring halachic disputes. And this should serve as an example of how similar historical circumstances led to additional cases of

long-term *machlokes*, notwithstanding the rule that the *halachah* always follows the majority.

The Original Question – Revisited

Having gotten this background regarding the historical makings of *machlokes*, let's now revisit the question which we asked at the beginning of this section, for now we're in a position to fully appreciate what we asked there. Namely, although regarding *halachos* being lost as a result of a certain detail not being particularly relevant, or because of the brevity of the teacher, one might be tempted to view it as "what just happens to have happened," this cannot be stated so easily regarding the other causes which we listed above for *machlokes*. That is, events such as national tragedies and persecutions, changing circumstances of the nation, and other similar large scale events are all the product of the Overseer of History – Hashem. And if these historical processes indeed led to enduring disputes, then to the extent that God guides history, to that extent we must conclude that **Hashem wanted this breakdown in the transmission of the oral tradition to occur**. And the truth is that even regarding the *halachos* that were lost because of the teacher's brevity and the like can hardly be attributed to happenstance. After all, it is a basic tenet of Judaism that *everything* is the result of the will of Hashem, not just the large scale historical events. If so, this would seem to indicate that all of the disputes that ever occurred, along with the attendant fuzziness in the Oral Torah that emerged as a result, are ***all part of Hashem's plan***, and are something that He actually wanted. But all of this of course begs the question; WHY?! Why would Hashem want this? Why would Hashem let this happen?

It's to answering this question that the current section of this booklet is dedicated. But let's first note an additional mystery concerning the timing of the events described above.

Chapter 18

The Mystery of the Timing

If we take all those things which led to the proliferation of enduring *machlokes*, and which in turn led to Man's increased role in the unfolding of the Oral Torah, one will readily notice that all of the relevant events took place – or at least began to take place – during **the Second Temple Era**. That is, in order for an enduring *machlokes* to exist, three ingredients are necessary, and if any of them are missing, a *machlokes* might still get off the ground, but it perforce won't endure long term, as we shall now explain. The most basic ingredient for a dispute is that there is no clear tradition concerning the relevant matter from a source that both sides of the dispute subscribe to, thus creating the room for a potential disagreement. The second ingredient of a dispute is that the two people involved in the dispute see things differently. And lastly, in order for a dispute to endure, there needs to be an *absence* of a ruling body that might've potentially come to a firm verdict concerning which disputant is right.

Examining the cases of enduring *machlokes* within Torah, we in fact find *all three* ingredients. Firstly, as we saw in the previous chapter, during the Second Temple era, as a result of the persecutions at that time, as well as other practical considerations, laws, especially their finer details, began to be forgotten, thus creating the need for the Torah scholars to reestablish those laws through their own Torah study. Secondly, as can be seen from the *Zugos* (Pairs) in the first chapter of *Pirkei Avos*, come the fourth generation of sages during the Second Temple era, no one sage had the capacity to contain within himself the entire Torah anymore. And so whereas until then, the oral tradition had only been given over to one leading sage, who then disseminated these teachings to the nation, the oral transmission was now given over to two leading sages at a time. Inasmuch as different minds perforce see things differently, giving over the Oral Torah to two sages would inevitably lead to increased disputes among the sages – which is exactly what happened. As we'll discuss below, the first ever enduring *machlokes* was not surprisingly between the first ever *Zug* (pair) to receive the oral tradition. In any event, the third ingredient for an ongoing dispute – the absence of a decisive ruling body – was fulfilled when the Great Court, the *Sanhedrin*, was abolished by the Romans, along with subsequent interruptions in holding sessions, thereby preventing a vote regarding cases of doubt in order to determine the majority opinion (also as discussed in the previous chapter).

But to the extent that all of the precedents of *machlokes* all center around the same basic period of time, this timing of events begs an explanation. That is, what's the significance of all this occurring at roughly the same time in history – the Second Temple era?

Chapter 19

The Era of the Prophets And the Era of the Sages

The Three Stages of Every Process of Spiritual Growth

In order to properly understand this matter, let's first clarify the three stages present in every growth-process. This threefold pattern is the subject of one of the modern classics of Jewish literature – *Living Inspired* by Rav Akiva Tatz *shlit"á*, and is discussed by such Torah giants as the *Bnei Yissaschar* (Rav Tzvi Elimelech Shapiro of Dinov), the *Leshem* (*Leshem Shvo V'Achlamah* by Rav Shlomo Elyashiv), and Reb Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin, all basing themselves on yet earlier sources.

In order to elucidate this matter, let's go straight to a metaphor. Imagine a pizza store that makes the best tasting pizza in the world. However, in order to in fact make the choicest pizza to be found, the pizza store uses only the best ingredients, and their increased expenses force them to charge \$10 a slice. Now, anyone who actually tastes a slice from this store will gladly pay the extra money considering the outstanding quality of this pizza. But without first tasting a slice, who would ever pay \$10, when down the block one can get a slice for \$2.50 at the competition? Now, what would be a way out of this dilemma? Free samples. That is, every customer is entitled to one free slice, and after tasting "the best pizza in the world," they'll be more than happy to come back for more, notwithstanding the expense involved.

And so it is regarding all spiritual growth. Such growth requires a large investment of mental, physical, and emotional effort – and as we learned in Chapters 4-6, **effort is a veritable must if a person is to emulate that which Hashem is the way that He is *not* from an outside source**. But what's going to inspire a person to in fact make the sacrifice? Here too, the answer is: a free sample. That is, **before Heaven requests of a person to grow spiritually in a given area, that person is given that target-level for free**. He learns with *hasmadah*; he davens with *kavanah*; he's careful with his eyes; he feels close to Hashem – and *it feels great*. Until, of course, the free gift is withdrawn, and this person finds himself back at square one, with the same lousy davening and morning seider. But – and this is the key – having experienced that higher *madreigah* and its attendant exhilaration, this individual will now be willing to invest the necessary effort in order to achieve that *madreigah on his own* (which is the goal, as per our discussion in

Chapters 4-6 concerning achieving similarity to Hashem through becoming responsible for oneself and all that one possesses), and not because it was given to him.

This then is the three-stage pattern of *all* spiritual growth. **Stage one** is that the individual who's expected to grow receives the target goal as a free gift. **Stage two** is when that free gift is removed in order for this person to acquire that level through his own efforts. **Stage three** is when this individual utilizes the inspiration provided by stage one and the opportunity-for-self-growth provided by stage two to indeed achieve the target-*madreigah* on his own.

Application of this pattern to numerous areas of life in general, and Judaism in particular, can be found in the above mentioned volume *Living Inspired*. For now, let's focus on how this pattern pans out in history.

The Great Transition of History

An oft repeated teaching of the Leshem, based on earlier sources, is that every pattern that is found on the micro-scale, can be found on the macro-scale too. As such, just as each particular area of spiritual growth involves the three stages discussed just above, so too, life can be divided into these three stages. In youth, without the numerous challenges of life, spirituality is relatively easy (stage one). Then comes the middle decades of one's life, when marriage, family, and earning a living occupy so much of one's time and energies, that spiritual growth can be quite a challenge (stage two). An individual who rises to this challenge can then come to his older years as a self-made-“spiritual-millionaire” (stage three). And just as life can be divided into these three stages, so too history as a whole; hence that from the time of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* until the destruction of the First Temple, spirituality was – *relatively speaking* – **a given**. This isn't to say that the generations living then weren't spiritually challenged, for they certainly were. However, all of those challenges were **within the context of spirituality for sure being real** (with the challenge being in connection with issues like “How many gods are there?” rather than with “Is there a God altogether?”). Then, around the time of *Megillas Esther*, not long before the building of the Second Temple, nationally-witnessed open miracles began to overall cease (as evidenced in the *megillah* itself), with the cessation of prophecy following not long afterwards. This was the transition into stage two on the historical scale. No longer would spirituality be a given. From then on, only through tremendous efforts, would one be able to return to experiences that in any way resembled those of the first stage of history. Though, considering how essential accomplishing-through-effort is to fulfilling the purpose of our existence (as clarified in Chapters 4-6 above), it's this second stage that represents “the ideal,” inasmuch as *it's the one that most allows for toil and labor* in regards to basic spirituality.

A more detailed discussion of the gradual fading of spiritual manifestations as history progresses, as well as a discussion of the ramifications of this fading, are the subject of Rav Jeremy Kagan's absolutely phenomenal work *The Choice to Be*, and the interested reader is directed to that volume (see also Chapter 18 of "*Why Do I Need to Learn Gemara?!*" where we summarize key ideas from that volume; likewise see this writer's "*How Can I Appreciate that God's Involved with the World and with Me?*" – *Rationally Detecting Divine Providence in a World Lacking Supernatural Phenomena*). In the remainder of the chapter, we shall stay focused on how this transition from the era of prophecy and miracles, to the era when these items were absent, expressed itself regarding the study of the Oral Torah. **Unless stated otherwise, the source for all that follows here is the teachings of HaGaon HaGadol Rav Moshe Shapiro *shlit"a*, as brought in *The Jewish Self* (by the above-mentioned Rav Jeremy Kagan, who's a student of Rav Shapira) pp. 56-59, 86-87, & 95-97, and Rav Shapira's *Afikei Mayim – Inyanei Chanukah* pp. 15-25.**

Out of Nowhere

In order to break this topic open, let us ask the following piercing question. The first individual *Tanna* to ever be quoted in a *mishnah* is *Shimon HaTzaddik*, in the second *mishnah* in *Pirkei Avos*. *Shimon HaTzaddik* was the *kohen gadol* at the beginning of the Second Temple era. The fact that he was the first ever individual whose name is attached to a Torah thought begs the question: what was up until then?! Why are there no sages quoted in the Oral Torah before *Shimon HaTzaddik*, who flourished some thousand years after the Exodus from Egypt?! It seems as though the *Torah SheBaal Peh* is popping out of nowhere at the beginning of the Second Temple era...?

This question can also be asked regarding the first *mishnah* in *Pirkei Avos* itself. If one thinks for a moment about this *mishnah*, one immediately notices something quite strange. Before the first actual teaching is brought in the name of the Men of the Great Assembly, four links in the chain of the Oral Torah's transmission are mentioned: Moshe, Yehoshua, the *zekeinim* (elders), and the *nevi'im* (prophets). One can't help but wonder: did all of these great sages have nothing to say that was worthy of being included in *Pirkei Avos*, that the first group of people to be quoted for an ethical teaching is the Men of the Great Assembly? Didn't Moshe also have something appropriate for *Pirkei Avos* to teach us?

The subsequent teaching brought in the name of the *Anshei K'nesses HaGedolah* also seems mysterious. The *mishnah* precedes their statement with "**They** said" (with *Shimon HaTzaddik* being the first **individual** to be quoted). What is the meaning of "they said?" Did someone count to three, at which point they all said this line in unison?

The sharp reader will recall that back in Chapter 18 we asked an additional question regarding the Second Temple period: why is it that the three ingredients leading to the proliferation of enduring disputes within the Oral Torah can all be traced back to specifically that era?

All of these questions highlight the fact that as part of the general transition that took place at this time, a specific transition took place regarding the Torah's study and transmission. But what *exactly* happened then?

Transitioning from Prophets to Sages

The answer on all of these questions is with the pattern discussed above, in the first section of this chapter. As we saw there, the onset of the Second Temple era brought with it a complete change in the degree to which spirituality would be manifest. Until then, spiritual awareness was *a given* – hence that this era was accompanied by nationally-experienced open miracles, as well as with the presence of prophecy. After that time, spiritual awareness could only be achieved through enormous effort – hence that this new era *lacked* open manifestations of spirituality such as prophecy and miracles. From then on, rather than the leading figures being the prophets, the Sages *who gave it their all* in order to get to the depths of the Torah would now become the leading figures.

Hand in hand with the general transition that occurred at that time, a major transition took place concerning the study of the Oral Torah. As Rav Moshe Shapira *shlit"ta* explains in the sources listed above, during the era of prophecy, the study of *Torah SheBaal Peh* was itself **a quasi-prophetic experience**. That is, in that era, when a sage exerted himself in order to clarify an unknown Torah matter, he *openly felt* Hashem inspiring him with the proper understanding, parallel to (though certainly not to the same degree) a prophet receiving prophecy. **It is for this reason that the sages of that era never attached their names to their teachings. For since they openly felt the Divine source of their insights, to then go and attach their own names to those insights would be like plagiarism.** In contrast, ever since the era of prophecy ended, and the era of the Sages began, the insights coming to one who learns Torah are experienced as indeed coming from within ourselves – hence that since then, the names of the Torah sages *are* attached to their insights. Let us clarify this matter further in the context of a key teaching which we related in “*Why Do I Need to Learn Gemara?!*”

The Relativity of the Oral-Torah/Written-Torah Relationship

We saw in Chapter 9 of “*Why Do I Need to Learn Gemara?!*” that in reality, both the Written and Oral Torahs are the word of God; the only distinction between them is in **our perception** of where the *divrei Torah* are coming from: By *Torah SheB’Chsav*, we readily recognize it as coming prophetically from Hashem, whereas by *Torah SheBaal Peh*, we perceive it as coming from us (although it too is a hidden form of prophecy, as we discuss in the above source). The truth is, however, that the perception of the Oral Torah coming from us is **relative**. That is, in the earlier eras of history, closer to the time of *Matan Torah*, although the Oral Torah may have been perceived as coming from within **relative to the Written Torah**, **still**, relative to the Oral Torah of the Second Temple era, where the *divrei Torah* were felt to be coming **entirely from within**, the post-*Matan-Torah Torah-SheBaal-Peh* was actually **quite a prophetic experience** (as discussed just above). I.e., even if relative to the Written Torah there was an element of feeling that one’s own mind was the source of the *divrei Torah*, nevertheless, the individual scholar learning Torah at that time most certainly felt an influx from Above, and clearly recognized the Divine source of what he was learning.

It would appear to me that this idea can be seen in the writings of Reb Tzadok. (Note: the following is my own *chiddush*, and it should accordingly be read more critically.) Throughout *Pri Tzaddik*, Reb Tzadok lists different individuals who were *shoroshim* (roots) of *Torah SheBaal Peh*: Levi, Yehudah, Aharon, Yehoshua, Osniel ben Knaz, Dovid, Rabi Akiva...which of course leaves one wondering: Just who is really the root of *Torah SheBaal Peh* after all? And what does such a concept even mean altogether? It would seem that the answer on this question is in accordance with the above concepts. Namely, the exact extent to which the individual toiling in the Oral Torah felt that the *divrei Torah* were emerging from within was **a constantly changing process**. Each of the above individuals represented **a new level of perception** – a higher degree of feeling himself to be the source of the Oral-Torah-insights he was producing, relative to the way it had been beforehand. In this sense, ALL of the above individuals were “roots” of the Oral Torah, for they all represented new stages in the Oral Torah taking on its “dew” aspect. But again, relative to the way that the Oral Torah would be perceived further on in history, the Oral Torah experience from the time of *Matan Torah* until the end of the Persian Exile (in between the two Temples) was overall a prophetic one – hence, as we just saw, that they never attached their individual names to their teachings in that era. In this context it should be noted that although the onset of the Second Temple Era was the most clearly defined point in this process of Man playing a greater and greater role in the unfolding of the Oral Torah, the process itself was already in motion from as far back as *Matan Torah*. And as we’ll see in the next chapter, even after the main point of transition, the process continued to unfold further.

A Stretched Out Transition

It follows from the above that that which there are no *Tanna'im* from before the Second Temple Era *isn't* because *Torah SheBaal Peh* popped out of nowhere at that time, but was *rather* the consequence of the Sages being honest about the source of the insights that came to them during the prophetic era, which *they readily recognized* to be from Hashem. And it is for this very reason that no one from the first thousand years of Jewish national history is quoted in the beginning of *Pirkei Avos*. Even if Moshe, Yehoshua, the *zekeinim*, and the *nevi'im* all learned the Oral Torah, nevertheless, there was such a prophetic touch to this study – that is, there was such an awareness of the Divine source of the ideas – that they could never attach their individual names to any of the thoughts that flowed through them. And even if Yehoshua and those after him experienced a far greater degree of individuality in their study of *Torah SheBaal Peh* than Moshe, still, relative to the Oral Torah of the Second Temple era, it was largely a prophetic experience *for them too*. As such, only from *Shimon HaTzaddik* – who lived after the point of transition – and on, were individual names attached to those sages' Torah insights (parallel to that which these sages in fact *experienced* the insights as emerging from their own minds).

What about the collective term “They said” which appears in regards to the Men of the Great Assembly in *Avos* 1:1? What is this unusual terminology trying to teach us? Rav Kagan (see the sources above) explains that this indicates that the transition from a quasi-prophetic study of the Oral Torah, to a study of the Oral Torah involving the genuine sages toiling to get to the correct understanding, was *not* a sharp transition, but rather a relatively gradual one. That is, the Men of the Great Assembly lived at the point of transition itself. They were the first individuals to really experience *Torah SheBaal Peh* as flowing from within. BUT, **even then**, being at the earliest stages of such an experience, they too could not attach *any one person's* name to their teaching. Their experience, although not prophetic in nature, was nevertheless a collective one, and so the most that could be said about their teaching was “they said.” By the time *Shimon HaTzaddik* became the leading *Tanna*, the experience of individuality in learning the Oral Torah had become so pronounced, that it now became possible to in fact attach *Shimon HaTzaddik's* name to his teaching – for when he brought it into the world, he truly *experienced it* as coming from within. Although a great transition had thus taken place, and the Oral Torah had truly blossomed into its own, as noted above, this process was far from finished. The subsequent unfolding of the Oral Torah will be examined in the next chapter. But before examining that matter, let's first add further clarification to what we've learned so far

It's No Different Than Having Training Wheels

One might rightfully wonder: considering how purposeful Divine silence is in giving Man the opportunity *to put in that much more effort* when attempting to reveal the word of God into the world (with toil on the part of Man being the name of the game, as we've seen again and again in the current work), then why didn't Hashem start off Jewish History in "silent mode" right off the bat? Why did He first make it that there was an era of prophecy and open miracles, with this Divine silence coming only later on, around the era of the Second Temple? In light of the above, this matter can be well understood. After all, the above query is the same as asking: if the goal is to ride a bike without training wheels, then why start off with training wheels? The latter question is of course ridiculous. True, the ultimate goal is to ride a bike without assistance – but the journey to doing so perforce involves falling and getting bruised. As such, what's going to inspire the aspiring bike rider to put up with these challenges, rather than giving up and going back to his tricycle? The answer of course is: the period of time in which he rode his new bike with training wheels; for it is then that he learned how liberating it is to ride a bicycle relative to a tricycle, and thus, returning to the tricycle is simply no longer an option. This individual now knows what riding a bike is all about, and if mastering the skill means getting bruised along the way, then so be it. And so it is regarding every "stage two." True, the goal is always to do it yourself. But without preceding the period of challenge with the period of the free gift, there is nothing to inspire and enthuse the individual coming to accomplish this new level on his own, to in fact rise to the challenge.

Plugging these ideas into the specific issue of Man's role in the unfolding of the Oral Torah, we can state as follows. Namely, as important as it is for Man to indeed play this role *with the maximum effort that's relevant*, like all "stage twos," it was necessary to precede even this one with a "stage one." That is, when Torah was lost and forgotten during and after the Second Temple Era, what encouraged the sages living then, and subsequently, to not panic, but rather to methodologically re-establish whatever was lost? The collective national memory that the sages of the first thousand years had done so – within their own context – whenever a similar situation arose with them. True, those earlier sages had the benefit of quasi-prophetic insight, whereas the later sages didn't and still don't. But knowing, based on the first stage of Jewish history, that Man does have the capacity to redraw the word of God into the world through himself, encouraged those subsequent sages to put in the effort to do so, even though in certain ways, it would be a greater challenge for them than it was for the earlier sages.

The Proliferation of *Machlokes* During The Second Temple Era - *Revisited*

Before moving on, let us tie up a loose end. In the previous chapter, we asked concerning why all of the causes of long-term/enduring disputes within Torah took place specifically in the Second Temple Era. Now that the significance of that period has been clarified, the answer to that question should be clear. That is, inasmuch as that period was the point of transition between the “free gift” stage of history and the “pulling-back-the-free-gift” stage of history – from which time the job of drawing down the word of God would be primarily dependent on the effort put in by the genuine sages, it makes perfect sense that it’s specifically at that time that Hashem put the relevant machinations into motion that would in fact allow for Man to play this new role.

It should further be noted that in light of what we’ve learned above, we can add a fourth reason for why enduring disputes proliferated at specifically that time. Namely, so long as one’s understanding of the Oral Torah came to him in a way that it’s Divine source was relatively clear, **with very little of that person’s individuality mixed in to the Divine transmission**, people overall absorbed those *divrei Torah* with a similar understanding, hence that there were no enduring *machlokes*. On the other hand, as the *lomeid Torah*’s individuality became more and more expressed during the Second Temple era, people accordingly began to see things differently, hence the proliferation of *machlokes* specifically then.

Having completed our focus on the earlier stages of the transition in Torah study that took place during the period of *Bayis Sheini*, let’s now move on to the subsequent unfolding of the Oral Torah.

Chapter 20

The Subsequent Unfolding Of the Oral Torah

The Crossroads of Divine Silence

As touched upon above, *even after* the primary transition took place at the time of the Men of the Great Assembly and *Shimon HaTzaddik* – from an Oral Torah whose study provided insights experienced in a quasi-prophetic manner, to a *Torah SheBaal Peh* whose insights were experienced as coming from within the individual studying it – there was still a further pulling-back on God's part, in order to give Man yet more room to be involved in the revelation of the word of God into the world. However, this increase in Divine silence would ultimately emerge as *a crossroads*. After all, Divine silence is a reality that can be used properly or grossly misused – as is brought out by the following amazing observation made by my rebbe and mentor, Rav Amos Luban *shlit"ta* of *Yeshivat Netiv Aryeh*.

As is well known, the fourth generation of *Tanna'im* brought with it the first ever *machlokes* AGAINST *Torah SheBaal Peh*, in the form of *Tzadok* and *Baytos* who outright denied the truth of the Oral Torah. These two students of *Antignos Ish Socho* misunderstood a statement of their teacher, thus leading them onto the road of heresy. If we move along to *maseches Chagigah* 16a (bottom of the *amud*), we find a *machlokes* between *Yossi ben Yo'ezer Ish Tzreidah* and *Yossi ben Yochanan Ish Yerushalayim* regarding whether or not *semichah* is performed on a *korban* on Yom Tov. The *mefarshim* there comment that this was the first ever **enduring** *machlokes* in *Klal Yisrael* (as touched upon in Chapter 17 above). With one look at the first chapter of *Pirkei Avos*, it will immediately be noticed that the two individuals involved in this *machlokes* were *also* students of *Antignos Ish Socho*. **It thus follows that the first ever enduring *machlokes* AGAINST the Oral Torah, and the first ever *machlokes* WITHIN the Oral Torah both took place in the same exact generation!** Based on all of the above, this point is readily understood. As we have mentioned, although the primary transition in how *Torah SheBaal Peh* is experienced took place at specifically the beginning of the Second Temple era, this process continued to unfold *during* the Second Temple Era, with **the pulling back of the clarity** of the Divine source of *Torah SheBaal Peh* becoming greater and greater, thus allowing for increased expressions of individuality in one's study of the Oral Torah. At the time of the fourth generation of *Tanna'im*, the Divine silence became so great – the ability for each individual to express his individual

understanding of Torah became so pronounced – that it now became possible for two individuals to see things differently *enough so* as to have an enduring *machlokes* with one another. The two *Yossis* **made proper use** of this “room-for-man-to-talk,” each one drawing down the light of Torah through the prism of their individual being, thus leading to the first enduring *machlokes* WITHIN *Torah SheBaal Peh*. In contrast, *Tzadok* and *Baytos* **entirely misused** this “room-for-man-to-talk,” thus leading to the first ever *machlokes* AGAINST *Torah SheBaal Peh*.

The Ongoing Challenge

Jumping back for a moment to the *general* issue of the changing degrees of spiritual manifestations as history proceeds, as pathetic as the spirituality of the Second Temple era was relative to the era of prophecy, it goes without saying that the spirituality manifested then *towered over* the degree of spirituality that was manifest following the destruction of the Second Temple. And even the latter *towered over* the degree of spirituality that’s manifest at present, in the depths of the final exile.

Again, the details of *why* Hashem has constantly made spirituality a greater and greater challenge to attain are the subject of Rav Kagan’s masterpiece – *The Choice to Be*, and are beyond the scope of the current volume. Likewise, further details concerning the content of the current and previous chapters can be found in this writer’s “*How Can I Appreciate that God’s Involved with the World and with Me?*” – *Rationally Detecting Divine Providence in a World Lacking Supernatural Phenomena*, which includes both a far broader discussion of the three stages of history (with a focus on the great transition that took place at the beginning of *Bayis Sheini*), as well as additional details concerning how all of this manifested itself in regards to the unfolding of the Oral Torah (these additional points were not presented here because they can only be properly understood in the context of the expanded framework that’s brought in that work).

But in any event, in broad strokes it can be stated that to the extent that the challenge to bring Torah into the world increases when the inherent-spirituality of Man decreases, to that extent, this ongoing fading of spirituality creates *greater and greater opportunities* for Man to play a role in drawing down the word of God into the world, **which is what’s most befitting for individuals who are trying to emulate God, and thus be as responsible as they can be for all that they are and all that they possess**. And it’s hoped that by understanding that this is all *purposeful*, the reader will be enthused to rise to the challenge, rather than get knocked down by it; which brings us to the final point in this chapter.

This Was No Accident!

We asked above in Chapter 16: In contrast to the organized Oral Torah of *Moshe Rabbeinu*, our Oral Torah has turned into this seemingly giant mess, leaving us wondering: why does Hashem want it to be this way?! After all that we've learned, it should become quite evident that **this was no accident!** This was indeed all **a purposeful process** that would create more and more room for Man to labor and toil when drawing down the light of Torah – the word of God – into the world, **while at the same time** leaving much of the Torah intact so as to serve as a guideline for us in our attempts to participate in the drawing down of the *dvar Hashem*.

Section *Five*:
**Preventing a
Free-for-All**

Chapter 21

Defining a Genuine Torah Sage

Inasmuch as this booklet has revolved around the role of Man in the unfolding of the Oral Torah, it would be sorely incomplete unless we clarified how far this booklet's ideas are from the mistaken ideas of groups such as Conservative Jews.

The key point to note in this topic is what has already been discussed in Chapter 9 of "*Why Do I Need to Learn Gemara?!*" There we clarified that although Man has been given the opportunity to weigh out the different facets of a given *halachah* in deciding the practical law, and although Man is theoretically capable of being a pipeline for the word of God to enter the world, *still*, this matter is **hardly a free-for-all**. We shall now reproduce what we wrote there due to the relevancy of this matter to the current work.

Firstly, on a practical level, one cannot begin to speak about *definitively* producing a genuine Torah idea without first knowing large amounts of Torah. That is, the human mind needs sufficient exposure to the Torah way of thinking before it can begin to also think in such a way.

Of particular significance is the rule laid down by Rav Yisrael Salanter, the founder of the *Mussar* movement (which was dedicated to making sure that the ethical standards of Torah scholars matched their Torah knowledge). Rav Yisrael taught (see *Chochmah U'Mussar, ma'amar* 11, 8th and 9th paragraphs) that one can only hope to draw down the unadulterated word of God when learning Torah *if* one approaches his studies free of any *personal* biases or goals such as honor or the like. In short, one must precede one's learning with a genuine refinement of one's character. Without this, Rav Yisrael taught, there is a danger that one's Torah thoughts will not be Torah at all.

Ultimately, all 48 kinyanei Torah (the "Ways Through Which the Torah is Acquired") enumerated in Chapter 6 of *Pirkei Avos* are necessary prerequisites for producing a Torah thought which is indeed the word of God coming through man. In this context, "*kinyan ha'Torah*" refers to the ability to produce genuine *divrei Torah* – that is, the ability to draw down through oneself the *dvar Hashem*.

Because it's so crucial not to error in this matter, let us take a moment to actually list these 48 ways (as translated in the Artscroll siddur) so that the difference between a true Torah sage vs. some bogus "Rabbi" should be unmistakably clear: **Study, attentive listening, articulate speech, intuitive understanding, discernment, awe, reverence,**

modesty/humility, joy, purity, serving the sages, closeness with colleagues, sharp discussions with students, deliberation, [knowledge of] Scripture, *mishnah*, limited business activity, limited sexual activity, limited pleasure, limited sleep, limited conversation, limited laughter, slowness to anger, a good heart, faith in the sages, acceptance of suffering, knowing one's place, being happy with one's lot, making a protective fence around his personal matters, claiming no credit for himself, being beloved, loving the Omnipresent, loving [His] creatures, loving righteous ways, loving justice, loving reproof, keeping far from honor, not being arrogant with his learning, not enjoying *halachic* decision-making [due to the great responsibility involved], sharing his fellow's yoke, judging him favorably, setting him on the truthful course, setting him on the peaceful course, thinking deliberately in his study, asking and answering, listening and contributing to the discussion, learning in order to teach, learning in order to practice, making his teacher wiser, pondering over what he has learned, and repeating a saying in the name of the one who said it.

The Gra (the **G**aon, **R**av **E**liyahu – the Vilna Gaon), in *Kol Eliyahu* on *Bava Metziah* 59b, notes that of these forty eight items, the Sages themselves single out three of them as being particularly significant: הסתפקות/being satisfied with a small amount (which is the idea of “Happy with One’s Lot” on the above list, and also includes the limitations of earthly pleasures mentioned there), humility, and diligence (which is synonymous with the first item on the above list: study). Among the sources that he brings to establish the increased significance of these three qualities are:

- Concerning Satisfaction: the *midrash* (quoted in Tosafos to Kesuvos 104a) states “Before you pray that Torah should enter your heart, pray that מעדנים/physical-delights don’t enter you.”
- Concerning Humility: Isaiah 55:1 compares the Torah to water, concerning which the Sages comment (in Taanis 7a): “Just as water flows from a high place to a low place, so too Torah only lasts in a person who’s humble in thought.”
- Concerning Diligence: The Gemara in *Eiruvin* (21b-22a) states that: במי אתה מוצאן? במי שמשכים ומעריב עליהם בבית המדרש / “In whom do you find them (words of Torah)? In he who goes early and stays late for them, in the *beis ha’midrash* (house of study).”

It should be noted that many more sources exist concerning each of these points.

Killing Oneself in the Tent of Torah

There’s an additional teaching of the Sages that’s highly relevant to our topic. In *parashas Chukas* (*BaMidbar* 19:14), the Torah states זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל – “This is the Torah/instruction/law when a man dies in a tent...” *Reish Lakish* comments on this (in *Berachos* 63b): אין דברי תורה מתקיימין אלא במי שממית עצמו עליהם – “The words of the

Torah *only last* in one who kills himself over them” – that is, in one who labors in Torah study until the point of utter physical exhaustion. (See also the *Midrash Tanchumah* in *parashas Noach*, ג אורח, that was quoted in Chapter 3 above, for more on this point.)

What does it mean for *divrei Torah* “to last”? We would like to suggest the following explanation. The verse in *Mishlei* 12:19 states "שפת אמת תיכון לעד" / “a lip of truth shall be established forever.” *Reb Tzadok HaCohen* of Lublin will often use this *possuk* to bring out the point that **something that is genuinely true lasts forever**. Applying this thought to the above Gemara, *Reish Lakish* is stating that one will **only** produce **genuine and true** *divrei Torah* (that will then “last”) **if** he pushes himself to the limits of his physical powers in his attempt to discover the Divine Will.

What would be the explanation of such an idea? In Rav Shlomo Wolbe *zatzal*'s *Alei Shur* Part II, pg. 456, the great *mashgiach* of *Yeshivas Mir* in Pre-WWII Poland – Rav Yerucham Levovitz *zatzal*, is quoted as saying: "ומי שמנצל כל מה שניתן לו בטבע, זוכה ללמעלה מן הטבע" / “He who uses all of his natural abilities, merits a revelation of the supernatural.” That is, when one serves God with so much effort so as to reach the edge of his physical abilities, he then breaks the bounds of the physical world and merits a revelation from above the physical realm. This would appear to be highly relevant to what *Reish Lakish* is saying (according to our explanation of his words). That is, as we’ve seen, learning Torah involves actualizing the innate Torah knowledge of the soul. But to reach the spiritual soul, and draw out from its hidden wellsprings of Torah, one needs to first break through the physical limitations of the body. And this is accomplished by pushing oneself to one’s physical limits, or, as the Sages put it, by “killing oneself in the tent of Torah.”

For more regarding the prerequisites of drawing the word of God into the world, see also the numerous quotes on this subject from *The Choice to Be*, in Chapter 18 of “Why Do I Need to Learn Gemara?!”

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As for the Conservative “Rabbis” – they generally don’t know very much (if any) Torah; they’re far more interested in their personal agendas than in genuinely clarifying the will of the Creator; and are certainly far from reaching the point of total physical exhaustion in their supposed attempt to clarify the *ratzon Hashem*. And as for the 48 ways by which the Torah is acquired – if they fulfill even five of them, I’d be quite surprised. It should accordingly be clear that such “Rabbis” have no connection whatsoever to anything written in this booklet as regards the role of Man in the unfolding of the Oral Torah, hence our constant emphasis on “**the genuine Torah Sages.**”

Chapter 22

Reading the Text for What it Really Says

Another key prevention of Torah-interpretation turning into a free-for-all is the fact that what a sage says must be completely rooted in and consistent with the exact text found in the Written Torah. This is likewise a matter that was discussed at length in Chapter 12 of “*Why Do I Need to learn Gemara?*”, and here too, we shall reproduce the core parts of that discussion in light of their relevancy to the current booklet:

The truth is that...*we think* that we know how to read a verse properly, and that it’s the Sages who are straying from the straightforward meaning. But in reality, *on the contrary* – it’s they who knew how to read a *possuk* properly, and not us. But in order to not miss anything, let’s approach this matter step by step. And in clarifying this subject (of the beyond-our-*imagination exactitude* with which the Talmudic sages interpreted the Written Torah) we’ll gain further lessons concerning the fact that the Oral Torah is not *chas v’shalom* some free-for-all of Torah interpretation, but rather involves super-careful analyses that are intended specifically for the true sages of every generation.

The first thing to note is that in *Ayelet HaShachar*, which is the introduction of the *Malbim* (Rav **M**eir **L**eibush **b**en **Y**echiel **M**ichel, who flourished in the mid-1800s, and was unquestionably one of the greatest biblical commentators ever) to his commentary on *VaYikrah*, he **provides a detailed list of 613(!)** principles that were used by the Sages in interpreting the Written Torah – 248 linguistic principles, and 365 guidelines for understanding verbs and seeming-synonyms. **Take out a *Malbim* on *VaYikrah* and you can see it for yourself!** This alone should make it clear to us how much depth went into an interpretation of one of the Talmudic sages, and that such explanations were hardly made on whim.

The full power of the preceding point lies in the fact that when taking into account that the Sages employed 613 rules when seeking to properly understand the written text, it becomes clear that **THE DRASHOS OF CHAZAL ARE TOTALLY INDICATED BY THE WRITTEN TEXT, WHEN THAT TEXT IS READ PROPERLY.** Or, in the words of the *Malbim* (from his above-mentioned introduction to *VaYikrah*, quoted in Artscroll’s *Be’er HaGolah* pg. 80/footnote 20): **“הדרוש הוא הפשט הפשוט המוכרח והמוטבע בעומק הלשון” / “The drashos of Chazal are the simple meaning of the text that must be, and which is stamped within the depth of the language.”** This fact pulls out the rug from under the *Tzadokim* (Sadducees), *Karites*, and all the other deniers of *Torah SheBaal Peh* in one fell swoop. For even these groups acknowledged the authenticity of the Written Torah. As such, the *Malbim* would tell them: “If you accept the Divine origin of *Torah SheB’Chsav*, then you should certainly accept the *drashos* of *Chazal* on that written text inasmuch as these *drashos* are

THE PROPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE WRITTEN TEXT *when one is careful to note every single nuance contained in the original Hebrew text.*” In this sense, the Torah can be compared to a Magic Eye image, that when looked at, at first glance, one sees a certain picture, but upon staring at the image long enough, one notices a completely different picture. The latter was there all along, but only when the eyes are focused on the image properly does the second picture “pop out.” And so it is regarding the Torah. All the depth that Hashem wants to communicate to us is *there all along*. But only when the proper effort to see that depth is exerted, do those deeper layers become noticed and understood.

It should be noted that the *Malbim* doesn’t only make this claim on a theoretical level. His commentary on *Chumash* is **all about** SHOWING the truth of the above. In order to appreciate this point, a little background is necessary. It is well known that the pillar of the Oral Torah is the Six Orders of *Mishnah*. Less known is the fact that there is another major pillar for *Torah SheBaal Peh*, and that’s the *halachic midrashim*: ***Mechiltah*** (on *Shemos*), ***Sifra*** (also known as ***Toras Cohanim***, on *VaYikrah*), and ***Sifri*** (on *BaMidbar* and *Devarim*). These works, like the *Mishnah*, contain the teachings of the *Tanna'im* (mishnaic sages), and the rulings that are found in the *Mishnah*. However, their major addition is that they contain ALL of the *drashos* upon which the rulings of the *Mishnah* are based, all presented directly on the *possukim*, following the order of the *possukim* in the *Chumash*. Thus the *mishnah* and *halachic midrashim* can be viewed as **sister texts**; the *halachic midrashim* are a direct “commentary” on the *Chumash*, whereas the *mishnayos* take that same information, and present only the bottom-line-rulings, with all related pieces of information being put together into chapters and *masechtos*. Although the *Malbim*’s *peirush* on *Bereishis* and the beginning of *Shemos* are written in the style of a typical biblical commentary, for the remainder of the *Chumash* – on which the above mentioned *halachic midrashim* were written, he brings the entire text of the *Mechiltah*, *Sifra*, and *Sifri*, and **he proceeds to explain every drashah found therein**. He does this by employing the above-mentioned 613 rules, with **his primary focus being on showing how the Sages came to their drashos through a super-careful reading of the text, and that it is they, not we, who knew how to read the text for what it actually says**.

In addition to the *Malbim*...Rav Samson Rafael Hirsch and the *Torah Temimah* (by Rav Baruch Epstein)...also placed an emphasis on understanding how the Sages derived their *drashos* from the nuances of the written text itself. (Parenthetically, it’s not surprising that all three of these rabbis flourished in the era when “enlightened” Jews were relentlessly attacking the authority of the Oral Torah. As such, they all realized that unless the complete intertwining of the Written and Oral Torahs was clarified for one and all, the heretics might easily convince the masses that their unfounded attacks on *Torah SheBaal Peh* were true.)

Inasmuch as seeing is believing, the above discussion in Chapter 12 of “*Why Do I Need to Learn Gemara?*” is followed by three actual examples of the above claim, in the context of the Sages’ claiming that...:

- All references in the Torah to “an eye for an eye” refer to monetary payments
- When *Devarim* 25:11-12 teaches: “If men are fighting together, one man with his brother, and the wife of one of them draws near to save her husband from the hand of his attacker, and she sends forth her hand, and grabs [the attacker’s] private parts, you shall cut off her hand. Let your eye not take pity,” it’s not that her hand is actually cut off, but rather she must pay the victim monetary compensation (at least according to one opinion)
- When *VaYikrah* 22:28 states "וישור או שה, אותו ואת בנו, לא תשחטו ביום אחד" / “...An ox and a sheep, it and its child, you shall not slaughter on the same day,” this prohibition refers to specifically **the mother** and its child, but *not* to the father and its child, even though it would *seem* that the verse openly states *the opposite* of what the Sages are saying! That is, the *possuk* states אותו ואת בנו *in the male form*, rather than אותה ואת בנה *in the female form*. It would accordingly appear from the simple meaning of the verse that this prohibition applies *specifically* to the father, and *specifically not* to the mother.

All that is followed by Chapter 13 of “*Why Do I Need to Learn Gemara?*”, which seeks to apply the above ideas to the Sages’ explanations of enigmatic biblical narratives. And that discussion concludes with Chapter 14 there, which addresses the obvious question: why doesn’t the Written Torah speak more clearly, openly stating exactly what it means, thus leaving no room for wrong understanding?

The interested reader is directed to those three chapters of “*Why Do I Need to Learn Gemara?*” for the full treatment of the above three topics.

Section *Five*:
**Summary and
Conclusion**

Chapter 23

Summary

- The genuine Torah sages and students are involved in *Torah SheBaal Peh* in three distinct ways: 1) In regards to keeping the Oral Torah alive and properly understood through abundant effort, 2) in regards to weighing out the various clear-cut facets of a given topic, in order to determine the practical law, and 3) in regards to clarifying what the different sides of an issue are altogether. This last point primarily became relevant during the Second Temple era, at which time historical circumstances caused a total breakdown in the clarity of virtually every stage of the oral tradition, thereby necessitating clarification even concerning what the various facets of each *sugyah* (halachic topic) are to begin with. It has been the goal of the current work to understand the deeper significance of each of these points, with a focus on why God set it up this to begin with.
- Man was created in order to achieve *dveikus* with Hashem. As with human relationships, this oneness results from relating directly to God (and vice-versa), which is the idea of direct relationship, which is in turn described by the Torah as face-to-face relationship (with face-to-face primarily being conceptual, rather than literal). When such a thing exists, it leads to a heart-to-heart connection, which is verily the essence of *dveikus*.
- If the soul never descended to the physical plane of existence, where it can express free will, then it would never be able to relate directly to Hashem, and it would accordingly never be able to achieve *dveikus* to Hashem. This is based on the teaching of the Sages (in the context of a *tzelem Elokim* taking charity) that when a person encounters something external to themselves which contradicts their inner essence, then they “turn the other way”; that is, they can’t relate directly to that thing. This would certainly apply to a *neshamah* that never came to *Olam HaZeh* inasmuch as that soul’s essence is initially fundamentally dissimilar to God, considering that God is intrinsically the way He is, whereas a soul, to begin with, is completely programmed to be the way that it is from the outside (i.e., by Hashem). Thus the relationship between God and the raw soul is analogous to the relationship between a genuinely handsome individual and his reflection in the mirror, whereby that reflection really has nothing to do with those good looks which are coming completely from an outside source (and if someone ugly was looking into the mirror, it would reflect those looks too, just the same). And seeing as the essence of *dveikus* with God involves relating directly to Hashem, such a *neshamah* – which in light of the above can’t relate back to God – could never achieve *dveikus* with Him.
- As touched upon at the beginning of the previous bullet-point, the solution to the preceding problem is for the soul to descend to earth, where Godliness is hidden

enough for free will to be possible. If that soul now *chooses* to be Godly – if it *chooses* to acquire Godly *shleimus*/perfection (i.e., relatively speaking – to the degree that’s possible for a created being) of its own will and volition – then this individual will now indeed become fundamentally similar to God. After all, such a soul is now Godly *not only* in regards to the attributes it possesses, *but also* in regards to the manner in which that person came to be that way; namely, from within oneself, rather than from an outside source. Though, in achieving the goal to be as responsible for oneself as possible (in the attempt to be as Godly as we can be), it’s *not just* about choosing. **Effort is also crucial**, for the more effort that a person puts in to acquiring Divine *shleimus*, the more it’s attributed to the person. This all highlights that one of the bottom lines of life is that **one should seek to attain Godly perfection specifically with effort**.

- The Torah majorly bestows Divine *shleimus* upon a person in a number of ways. Combining this with the previous point that Godly perfection needs to be acquired specifically through effort, it follows that *limud Torah* is most ideal when it’s done with effort and toil, in particular – hence that God (and later on, the Sages) set up the Oral Torah in such a way that it can’t exist within the world or be properly understood without abundant effort on the part of the individual learning it. Though, as far as the acquisition of Divine *shleimus* that *limud Torah SheBaal Peh* allows for, we noted the following points:
 - The Torah is itself a manifestation of God’s Infinite Light, and through learning it, one achieves a degree of one-ness with Hashem not found in virtually any context – which in turn elevates a person spiritually
 - When an individual learns Torah, a special Divine force emanates from God’s “mouth” (as it were), which brings out the potential *shleimus* of that person. Though, this last point itself breaks down into two sub-points. That is, there’s the effect that this special Divine force has on a person’s *neshamah* in general – whereby it’s basically like food/gasoline for the soul, and accordingly brings out the soul’s inherent potential for achieving Godly perfection; and then there’s the effect that this force has on the mind, whereby it gives a person knowledge and understanding of the *divrei Torah* that are embedded in his *neshamah* since the beginning of its existence
 - Through *limud Torah* one comes to see the world from the vantage point of the *neshamah*, which is a fulfillment of the concept of *haskalah*, which the Ramchal states is one of the key facets of *shleimus*.
- *Chazal* teach that Hashem put the decision-making of halachah into the hands of the genuine sages, to the extent that God, as it were, follows the decisions of the sages, and even says over teachings in the name of the sage that said it. Included in this point is the fact that it’s been given over to the genuine students of Torah to determine the correct understanding of all the relevant teachings upon which the final halachah will

be based – for a sage, in a more conclusive way, and for a student, in a more tentative way (this last point having become relevant ever since historical circumstances led to a breakdown in clarity at virtually every level of the oral tradition).

- In granting the genuine stages and students the right of decision-making in Torah (each person according to the level that's befitting for him, given his level of Torah-scholarship), Hashem has allowed for the *lomeid-Torah* to...:
 - emulate God as a decision-making king
 - emulate Hashem as a Creator through producing *chiddushei Torah*
 - develop one's individuality through the decision-making that Torah study involves
 - build the *seichel* in the battle against unrestrained imagination
 - grow from the tension of opposing sides of an issue
 - acquire *daas-Torah* through in-depth Torah study
- Understanding the importance of effort and decision-making in Torah study also explains why those who organized the *Mishnah* and Gemara (and in the process put all the information relevant to a single topic not all in one place, but rather scattered here-and-there, not to mention the inherent ambiguity of virtually all teachings recorded in those works) did it in such a way that would still leave much room for toil and decision-making, notwithstanding that the oral traditions were now being committed to writing.
- The original *machlokes* was the result of *halachos* which were either lost or forgotten due to national tragedies and persecutions, a given decree or enactment no longer being relevant during a certain period, or halachic details becoming less relevant at a given time. Another cause for breaks in the transmission was the custom to teach with brevity. To accentuate the problem, constant interruptions to the proper functioning of the *Sanhedrin* during the Second Temple era prevented votes from being taken regarding the matters of dispute, thus allowing *machlokes* to proliferate.
- Inasmuch as all of the above was either allowed for or outright brought about by Divine Providence, it would seem clear that God wanted the above breakdown in the clarity of the Oral Torah to take place. In light of what we learned above concerning the importance of effort in *limud Torah* and the great spiritual-advantages of decision-making, Hashem's intention here can be understood; namely, this was Hashem's way of creating the opportunity for the genuine Torah students to toil, labor, and exercise their decision-making faculty in their studies to a whole new degree, as they try and distill the Torah-truth from amidst all the ambiguity and confusion.
- Notwithstanding the benefits of the lack of clarity that exists within *Torah SheBaal Peh*, Jewish history didn't start off with such a setup inasmuch as it was the centuries where the insights of the Oral Torah came to the Sages in a quasi-prophetic manner (in which the sage readily recognized that it was coming from God) that inspired the sages of later generations to in fact put in the necessary toil when studying the Oral

Torah, even though for them – living in the post-prophetic era – it was that much harder. This pattern parallels the general pattern found in all spiritual growth (which the mystical texts teach is the pattern underlying all of creation): a given level/degree-of-understanding is given for free (in order to provide a taste of what it's all about), then it's taken away, and then it's incumbent upon Man to now get back that level through his own efforts.

- Because the Sages of the Era of Prophecy felt their Torah insights coming from Hashem, they never attached their own names to those insights – hence that the concept of individual *Tanna'im* being quoted by name only begins in the Second Temple era, at which time Oral-Torah-insights began to be felt as coming from within.
- By the middle of the Second Temple era, Divine silence had reached the point where personal opinions could be expressed in an adamant enough way so as to lead to large scale halachic disputes. *Yossi ben Yo'ezer* and *Yossi ben Yochanan* used this new opportunity-to-be-involved properly, and in this context had the first ever enduring *machlokes* within the Oral Torah, whereas *Tzadok* and *Baytos* misused this opportunity-to-be-involved to have the first ever *machlokes* against the entire Oral Torah (in the sense of denying it altogether).
- A genuine Torah sage, who indeed has the power to draw down the word of God through himself into the world, is one who knows vast amounts of Torah, has perfected his character traits, and who fulfills all 48 *kinyanim* by which the Torah is acquired. Additionally, a true sage needs to completely push himself to the edge of his physical limits in order to merit a genuine Torah insight that comes from beyond this world.
- Both in regards to *halachah*, as well as regards to the biblical narratives, the *drashos* and comments of the Sages are completely rooted in what the text actually says, when the text, in all of its nuances, is read properly. This is a matter emphasized – and shown – particularly in the commentaries of the Malbim, Rav Samson Rafael Hirsch, and the *Torah Temimah*.

Chapter 24

Conclusion

As emphasized a number of times in this work, the role of the great sages in each generation and the role of the average Jew in the unfolding of the Oral Torah are not the same. The former seek to actually clarify and reconstruct the lost *halachos l'maaseh*, as well as offer *conclusive* interpretations of the texts upon which the halachah is based, whereas the latter are simply trying to understand what everyone is saying in a more tentative way. But whatever the case, God has given each Jew the chance to play *his* unique role in the ongoing unfolding of the Oral Torah, so that he can acquire more Godly *shleimus* in a way that's attributed to the person himself, and so that he can gain the many spiritual-benefits that emerge from being a Torah-decision-maker – all towards the end of achieving greater *dveikus* with Hashem.

And once it's understood how immense the positive effects of *limud Torah* are in regards to one's personal relationship with God, it can be appreciated that learning Torah is ***a golden opportunity to be utilized by each individual***, irrespective of everyone else. That is, each person – from the greatest sage to the simplest Jew – has his own unique relationship with God, and just as other people's getting married to their wives doesn't in any way diminish one's desire to be married to *his own* wife, so too, the fact that other people learn Torah is hardly a reason for a person to feel that his own study isn't particularly necessary. After all, a person's own *limud Torah* is the key to his own relationship with Hashem, and the fact that others are developing *their* relationships with Hashem has no bearing on anyone else.

And so, dear reader, take this information and be inspired by it to dedicate yourself to ***your*** unique portion of Torah. And may you and I, together with every Jewish *neshamah*, be privileged to achieve the *dveikus* with the Almighty that *limud Torah SheBaal Peh* engenders.

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Between “*Why Do I Need to Learn Gemara?*” and the current volume “The Oral Torah and Man,” much clarity has *b'ezras Hashem* been presented concerning the goals and mechanics of learning *Torah SheBaal Peh*. But there's so much more that can still be written about this topic. Much of what has yet to be said regarding this matter will God-willing appear in a third volume in this series entitled *The Oral Torah Odyssey: Continuing the Journey into the Deeper Dimensions of Torah SheBaal Peh and its Leading Sages*.