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**The Sweet Pleasure of *Bitachon***  
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**Joy in All Circumstances, with Pleasant Serenity**

**Constant Joy in Every State**

The *Chovos HaLevavos* concludes his opening to *Sha'ar haBitachon* by listing the final—and chief—material benefit that comes to the *ba'al bitachon*. **The *ba'al bitachon* remains joyful regardless of the situation into which the Ribbono shel Olam places him.**

The commentaries explain that in general, when a person loses his fortune, he must work mightily so that it shouldn't affect his serenity. But the *ba'al bitachon* is above any loss! He succeeds in remaining joyful even if he has lost all his money! This, explains the *Chovos HaLevavos*, is all **due to his great trust that the Ribbono shel Olam will do only what is good for him in every circumstance.** He knows that everything that the Ribbono shel Olam does is the very best thing possible for him.

**As in a Mother's Loving Embrace**

**"The trust that the *ba'al bitachon* places in the Ribbono shel Olam is similar to the trust an infant places in his loving mother"** who does so many things for his good—even though he may not always appreciate it at the time. She bathes him, she bundles him up... even though the child may protest. It is clear to all that she does so out of sheer love and compassion.

The *ba'al bitachon* feels this level of trust regarding everything that transpires. In every situation in his life, he feels that the Ribbono shel

Olam is like a mother who dotes on him and cares for him—as Dovid HaMelech says, *אם לא שויתי ודוממתי נפשי כגמול עלי אמו*, *I swear that I stilled and silenced my soul like a suckling child at his mother's side* (Tehillim 131:2).

Where did Dovid HaMelech draw the strength to endure the painful situations in his life? His strength came from the fact that he always felt like a “suckling child at his mother’s side.” Even when the mother’s action hurts, she is still displaying compassion and love. And this knowledge gave him the *kochos* to remain truly joyful throughout his ordeals.

### Nothing Can Take Away the Serenity of the Soul

The *Chovos HaLevavos* placed this benefit at the end of his list of benefits—as if to say, “I enumerated a long list of wonderful benefits that come to the *ba'al bitachon*...but now we’re at the pinnacle: **The benefit that nothing in the world can rob you of your joy!** Nothing in the world can disturb your serenity and your *kirvas Elokim*.” No matter what you may endure, you will always have the feeling that your mother is doting upon you. Such pain doesn’t hurt.

### **Bitachon Brings the Indescribable Pleasure of Closeness to Hashem**

### The Wonderful Sensation That Hashem Is Always with You

The *Chovos HaLevavos* is referring to the unique pleasure which the *ba'al bitachon* merits—far more than simply believing that everything that Hashem does is for the good. **The *ba'al bitachon* is *zocheh* to sense the close, loving feeling** that the Ribbono shel Olam is personally doting on him, like a devoted mother on her beloved child. This gives a person an indescribably pleasant and sweet feeling.

Dovid HaMelech says, *רבים מכאובים לרשע והבוטח בה' חסד יסובבנו*, *Many are the agonies of the wicked, but as for one who trusts in Hashem, kindness surrounds him* (Tehillim 32:10). The *rashah*, who is distant from *emunah* in Hashem, lives in agony. Everything he endures causes him pain. Here

his suit got stuck on a nail and ripped... there he got a cut... here he suffered aggravation from financial matters... and there he got into an interpersonal altercation or a painful family saga. Everything hurts him. *Many are the agonies of the wicked...*

## Surrounded by Kindness

But the **בוטח בה'** is surrounded by kindness! He doesn't sense difficulties, and nothing hurts him, because he lives with the sweet feeling of the pleasantness of Hashem—knowing that Hashem protects and accompanies him, just like a mother who dotes on her child.

With this idea, the Rishonim explain the *pasuk* **כל ימי עני רעים וטוב לב משתה תמיד**, *all the days of a poor man are bad, but a good-hearted person feasts perpetually* (Mishlei 15:15). The *poor man*, they explain, refers to poverty of the mind—i.e., he lacks *emunah* and *bitachon*, and for this reason, all his days are bad and painful, because every triviality hurts him. But the **טוב לב**, *the good-hearted person* who's satisfied with his lot feasts and rejoices. He knows that the Ribbono shel Olam gives him everything he needs, and thus he doesn't feel the pain that the *rashah* experiences.

## The Erroneous Interpretation of *Surrounded by Kindness*

Some may think that **חסד יסובבנו בה' הבוטח בה'** means that the *ba'al bitachon* will never experience a problem, he will be spared all misfortune. He'll never have to endure challenges, and his life will hum along like a well-oiled machine. He'll never lose money, he'll never suffer loss, he'll have a beautiful family that only brings him *nachas*, he'll never struggle with *chinuch*, he'll have a beautiful home and peace of mind, and he'll know how to get along perfectly with everyone, and so forth....

This is a small-minded outlook that views the world as though the pinnacle of fortune that a person can have is never to experience problems or challenges—and it's rooted in a lack of grasping Hashem. The person thinks that the entire reward for the *ba'al bitachon* is that he'll never suffer misfortune.

## The True Reward for *Bitachon* Is the Pleasantness of Hashem

But the *Chovos HaLevavos* teaches us that there's something far greater than this—and that is the great feeling of the pleasure of *kirvas Elokim* in every situation—even when we *do* experience challenges.

He teaches us that the Ribbono shel Olam gives the *ba'al bitachon* a far greater gift—the pleasant feeling of closeness to Hashem, and the pleasure of feeling the love of Hashem at every stage of his life. This is a wonderful pleasure—and it doesn't come because he has no problems, but because he's filled with the pleasure of *kirvas Elokim*!

This feeling is an entirely new level of pleasure. This person feels saturated with pleasure always and constantly—morning, noon, and night, whether or not he's experiencing challenges. He doesn't feel *tzaros* because he's saturated with pleasure! He always feels that the Ribbono shel Olam is here with him and surrounds and protects him. He sees it so clearly and he's filled with joy because he *feels* כי אתה עמדי! Automatically, he's surrounded only by good.

### A Pleasant Life

Sometimes, a person is so preoccupied trying to escape problems—because he thinks that the best thing that can happen is never to suffer problems—but he doesn't realize that the above level of pleasure is much more basic. **The *ba'al bitachon* experiences something far more pleasurable.**

The *sefer Menoras HaMa'or HaKadmon* (authored by Rav Yisrael Elnekave, a student of the Rosh) writes on the *pasuk* לֵב מְשֻׁתָּח כל ימי רעים וטוב לב משתח that the person who's poor in his *emunah* is always surrounded by worry and depression. But a person who is happy with his lot and who believes that the Ribbono shel Olam will provide his *parnassah* whenever he needs it, will always experience a pleasant feeling. In every situation, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, this person is joyful and content—because he lives with the feeling of having a set table with everything provided in front of him.

This is the opposite of ימי עני רעים. Someone who has *bitachon* will always have a happy heart. The Ribbono shel Olam will award him the sweet feeling of pleasure, and he will live a pleasant life.

## A Life of *Emunah* and Wonderful Pleasure

### Repeating Passages of *Tehillim*

A well-known Slonimer *chassid* once related that in his youth in Teve-ria, there was a terrible famine. There wasn't a morsel of food to be had.

One day, the *chassidim* stood around talking about the terrible *mat-zav*. "What will happen?" they lamented. "There's not a piece of bread to be found... and we don't have a penny with which to buy any food."

But one *chassid*, the legendary Rav Noach Weinberg, simply began reciting over and over the following *pesukim*: יודע ה' ימי תמימים ונחלתם לעולם, לא יבושו בעת רעה ובימי רעבון ישבעו, *Hashem knows the days of the perfect, their inheritance will be forever. They will not be shamed in time of calamity, and in days of famine they will be satisfied (Tehillim 37:18-19).*

In these verses, Dovid HaMelech speaks about those who have *emunah* in Hashem, and he states that the Ribbono shel Olam is always connected with them. They'll never be ashamed when going through hardship, and they will be satisfied even when there is a famine.

### The Sweet Taste That Lasted 70 Years

Reb Noach repeated these verses with so much sweetness and warmth that they brought great *chiyus* and illumination to all the *chassidim* who were present. **They truly felt the meaning of the words;** recognizing that the *ba'al bitachon* will retain his serenity and pleasant feeling even when there are days of hunger.

The *chassid* who related the story in his old age testified, "Believe me! More than seventy years have elapsed since then, and **every time that I remember the way Reb Noach said those words, I can still taste the sweetness that then penetrated our souls!**"

## With *Bitachon*, We Always Have the Serenity of Shabbos

The *ba'al bitachon* is rewarded with the gift that he always lives with the serenity and the restfulness that we find referenced in the *tefillos* of Shabbos. This illustrates that the pleasure a *Yid* feels doesn't necessarily stem from a lack of problems—but rather from a feeling of closeness to Hashem, as Rabbi Aharon HaGadol wrote in his *Zemer Koh Echsof*: השבת נועם הנשמות ועדן הרוחות להתעדן באהבתך וביראתך, *Shabbos is the pleasantness of the souls and the Eden of the spirit, to take pleasure in our love and awe of You.* This is where a *Yid* derives his pleasure, and *this* is what the pleasure of Shabbos is all about.

The *ba'al bitachon* is treated to feeling this pleasure permanently, in all situations.

### Unfathomable Light

The holy Komarner Rebbe writes in *Heichal HaBrachah* that when a *Yid* invests himself in the belief that there's nothing in this world but Hashem, that in every movement there's only the Master of the World, and he accepts everything that comes his way with love—then the doors of compassion will be opened before him, and he will be illuminated with unfathomable light.

The *ba'al bitachon* merits to receive such a light and pleasantness that it cannot even be described or comprehended with our mortal grasp.

The Komarner said about himself that he suffered from terrible poverty and destitution, and he was forced to wander from place to place. He also suffered from scoffing and mockery. **“But the *emunah* brought me such a supernal light, which surrounded me and gave me life—I didn't even feel all the pain!”**

This is the pleasure of which the *Chovos HaLevavos* speaks. This is the reward that the *ba'al bitachon* receives in this world. He feels such a tremendous closeness to the Ribbono shel Olam, and he is always surrounded by joy and pleasure due to the feeling of his reliance on Hashem, like a suckling child at his mother's side.

ל"ג בעומר  
"בחד קטירא אתקטירנא"

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## Becoming Tethered to the Ribbono shel Olam with a Sustained Connection

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### Why Rashbi Merited *Primiyus HaTorah*

#### With One Sustained Knot

The Zohar HaKadosh (*Parashas Ha'azinu*) says, "**Rabbi Shimon opened and said** (expounding on the words in *Shir HaShirim*) אני לדודי ועלי תשוקתו, *I am my Beloved's and He longs for my perfection. For all my days in this world, I was tied to HaKadosh Baruch Hu with one knot—and therefore He longs for me.*" This refers to the fact that the Ribbono shel Olam and all His Heavenly legions came down to hear the great סתרי תורה, the phenomenal Torah revelations, that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai disseminated prior to his passing.

That is, all these deep revelations came to him because Rabbi Shimon was constantly tethered to the Ribbono shel Olam for all his days, with one consecutive knot. The result of this great tethering בחד קטירא, *with one unbreakable knot*, was the great Torah lesson that Rashbi revealed to us.

Thus, let us learn this *inyan* that is so resonant for us as we approach the exalted day of the *hilula* of Rabbi Shimon.

#### Going Deeper

We know that Rabbi Shimon merited to bring down to this world an entirely new level of Torah—the entire תורת הנסתר, *the hidden Torah*—and everything that emanated from it, including all of *Kabbalah*, which is the

Torah of the Arizal, Rav Chaim Vital, and so many others over the centuries. All of it is rooted in the Torah revealed by Rabbi Shimon.

All this, the *Zohar HaKadosh* tells us, is the result of the “one knot” with which Rabbi Shimon tethered himself to the Ribbono shel Olam. This Torah, the סתרי תורה of *Kabbalah*, isn’t an *added* source of wisdom, a “new” Torah, *chas v’shalom*—rather, it is a *deeper* understanding of the revealed Torah. **It is the same Torah—but the hidden Torah enables us to understand everything in תורת הנגלה on a deeper level.**

Sometimes, a person who has mastered the *masechta* of *Bava Basra* now delves into *Maseches Yebamos*. **This person has now acquired a different, additional area of the revealed Torah.** Not so תורת הנסתר, which isn’t new but instead provides a deeper understanding into the revealed Torah and its mitzvos.

## The Revealed Torah Holds Much Meaning

When it comes to the hidden Torah, we see clearly that it isn’t a matter of amassing *more* knowledge and wisdom; instead, it is a way to appreciate the חכמה on a deeper level, on a more foundational level, in a more פנימיותי way, and in a more illuminated manner.

To understand this on our level, let us take as an example the mitzvah of Shabbos. Why must we observe Shabbos? In the revealed Torah, there is much that explains this mitzvah. It is a time to remember that the Ribbono shel Olam created the world, and that He conducts all matters in the world. It is a special bond between the Ribbono shel Olam and Klal Yisrael—a sign that we are special and beloved. Every word in *Kiddush* has tremendous אור according to the revealed Torah. We proclaim Hashem’s creation of the world, and His sovereignty over the world. We fulfill the d’Oraisa obligation of יזכור את יום השבת לקדשו.

We explain everything that transpired during the Six Days of Creation and the subsequent rest on Shabbos. We declare that the Ribbono shel Olam desired us and chose us, and He bequeathed the holy Shabbos to us following the Exodus from Mitzrayim, a time when we could appreciate being elevated and chosen, and when we could understand that the

world is really a spiritual place. Every word in *Kiddush* makes perfect sense the way we simply understand it—and it is indeed filled with light and meaning.

## Beyond the Revealed

But when we enter the realm of תורת הנסתר, we understand the entire concept of Shabbos in a completely different light. When we open a *Zohar HaKadosh* and read about Shabbos, entirely new levels become revealed to us—even just from what we recite in the *zemiros*.

There are seventy words in *Kiddush*: שבעין עיטורין על גבי חמשין — *seventy crowns with which we coronate the Ribbono shel Olam*. There is a whole world of light... with תיקונים and ייחודים that take place when we recite *Kiddush*. It's the very same mitzvah! But it is understood in a much deeper light.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai merited to perceive this new world and to reveal it to Klal Yisrael. And just as Rabbi Shimon saw and understood all this depth in every aspect of Torah, and in every mitzvah, so too did he perceive the essence of what a *Yid* truly is.

## The Deeper Essence of a *Yid*

What is the essence of a *Yid*? Everyone knows that a *Yid* is the descendant of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. We understand that a *Yid* was chosen by the Ribbono shel Olam. We understand that as *Yidden*, we're one nation united...and that the Ribbono shel Olam will redeem us all, as we say in *shemoneh esrei*, ומביא גואל לבני בניהם למען שמו באהבה. There are many aspects of the uniqueness and the specialness of a *Yid* that we can understand in a very obvious way.

But Rabbi Shimon looked at the essence of a *Yid* in a completely different light. Tzaddikim tell us that Rabbi Shimon is an advocate for every single *Yid*—אפילו לפחותים, *even the lowliest among them*. Rabbi Shimon testified that he could absolve the *entire world* from judgment! Rabbi Shimon—who, as we learn in the *Zohar HaKadosh*, knew the severity of an *aveirah* more than anyone else—saw through the exterior... and knew that even the lowliest *Yid* is filled with mitzvos!

**Rabbi Shimon saw a different *Yid*... what a *Yid* really is.**

Thus, *pnimiyus haTorah* gives us a much deeper understanding into every concept that we know from *nigleh*—and it revealed to us layers and layers in Torah and *Yiddishkeit* that aren't apparent on the surface.

## A Deeper Connection

What is the difference between a simple, plain understanding of these matters and a deeper, more illuminated view?

The first answer concerns **the level of connection we have with those concepts; that is, how *davuk* we are to it**. When a person has only a superficial understanding of something, he can't properly connect to that knowledge... there remains a chasm, a distance. The deeper he understands that concept, the more he can connect to it on an inner level.

When two friends first become acquainted, they don't know each other very well, and their connection and their relationship are superficial. The more they get to know each other and everything about each other, the deeper their connection becomes. The same applies to a relationship between spouses: their bond becomes stronger with the passage of time—because they come to know each other on a deeper and deeper level.

The *reason* behind this phenomenon is that when we know another person on a deeper level, **we come to understand that we're all derived from the same source, that all barriers and differences are only superficial**, and knowing this breeds love and connection. This understanding causes true friends to derive *chiyus* from one another. The more *pnimiyus* a person has in something, the greater is his *deveikus* in it.

## Getting to Know the Essence

### Knowing Breeds Connection

We find this idea in Rashi (*Parashas Vayeirah*). When Hashem re-

vealed to Avraham Avinu that He will overturn Sedom, the *pasuk* says about Avraham, *כי ידעתיו למען אשר יצוה את בניו ואת ביתו אחריו*, *for I have loved him because he commands his children and his household after him, and they keep the way of Hashem, doing charity and justice* (Bereishis 18:19). Rashi explains that the word *ידעתיו*, literally *knowing*, connotes connection: **“cherishing the person, drawing him close, knowing him, and understanding him.”** Hashem loved Avraham Avinu because He *knew* him!

This is one of the instances in which Rashi refers to a *kabbalistic* concept, explaining that **the root of דעת has two meanings: knowledge and connection**. This is because one brings about the other. When we have a deeper understanding of something, we become connected to it—because **we come to realize that any perceived barriers and differences are only superficial. At the root, we’re really one.**

### He Perceived It

Rabbi Shimon’s ability to advocate for all Klal Yisrael (as we say, *ימליץ* ... *טוב בעדיו*) and the fact that he was able to *absolve all of us from judgment* and to proclaim that a *Yid* didn’t really sin came from the fact that he merited to perceive what a *Yid* really is at his core.

We all can repeat what we have learned in the revealed Torah about the uniqueness and the exaltedness of a *Yid* and how much Hashem loves every *Yid*—but to perceive it on a level that will overwhelm us with awe requires *פנימיות התורה*. And this is what Rashbi revealed to the world.

### Who Can Advocate

One may say, why can’t all of us advocate for *Yidden*? After all, we can say that the person didn’t really mean it... he is really a *tzaddik*.... Why can’t we mimic the words of the great *tzaddikim* who defended *Yidden* and advocated for them? There are countless stories and anecdotes of the great *ישר יושר*, the Berdichever Rav, who saw only the good in *Yidden* and construed their every action for good. Why can’t we do the same?

The answer is that the *לימוד זכות* on *Yidden* doesn't happen when we merely mouth words of advocacy and defense—it happens when a *ne-shamah* down below comprehends and grasps with complete depth the true essence of a *Yid*! When such a *ne-shamah* advocates, it brings tremendous *נחת רוח* Above, and he's thus able to banish all judgments.

The *Zohar HaKadosh* is filled with accounts of the way Rabbi Shimon went against Heavenly decrees: "And I say no!" he declared. This was because he attained the level of understanding of what the *Ribbono shel Olam* really wants on a truly deep level... and the *Ribbono shel Olam* knew that Rabbi Shimon understood it. Otherwise, all his declarations would have been unsuccessful.

### When the *Ribbono shel Olam* "Eats and Drinks"

There's an incredible *Zohar HaKadosh* (*Parashas Pinchas*) that describes a time when Rashbi was on his way to Teveria and he encountered Eliyahu HaNavi along the way. When Eliyahu HaNavi greeted him, Rabbi Shimon asked, "What are they currently learning in the Heavens?" He answered, "They're learning the *sugya* of *korbanos*, and the *Ribbono shel Olam* is repeating *chiddushim* in your name; that is why I came here to greet you."

Eliyahu HaNavi then said to him, "I have one thing to ask you. In *Shamayim* they struggled to understand the following passage: *באתי לגני, אחותי כלה אריתי מורי עם בשמי אכלתי יערי עם דבשי*, *To your Tabernacle Dedication, My sister, O bride, I came as if to my garden, I gathered My myrrh with My spice from your princely incense, I accepted your unbidden as well as unbidden offerings to Me; I drank your libations pure as milk* (*Shir HaShirim* 5:1). We know that in the World to Come there is no eating or drinking. How can it be that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* drank wine and milk?"

Rabbi Shimon then asked, "And what does the *Ribbono shel Olam* answer to this question?"

"He says that this question should be answered by Bar Yochai," said Eliyahu, "and thus, I came to ask you."

Said Rabbi Shimon, “The love of the Ribbono shel Olam for His children is so great that **even though it is not His usual practice to eat and drink, He deviates from that practice out of love for them** when He encounters them.”

### Choosing the Inferior Offering

The *Mekubalim*, including the Ramak and others, explain this story. They clarify that this practice does not refer to *physical* eating and drinking, as will be explained. The *Zohar HaKadosh* greatly extolls the *ketores*, the incense that was brought in the Beis HaMikdash. It is an offering unlike any other, with the ability to nullify plagues and judgments. Why is it indeed so great?

Because, while we know that we can bring material sacrifices before Hashem—such as the flesh of the *korbanos*— and bring Him pleasure through it, **the greatest Heavenly pleasure comes when we sacrifice the most delicate of offerings, which is scent.** It’s not something that can even be touched. It is a more spiritual offering than any other, and it brings more pleasure to Hashem.

Nevertheless, the Ribbono shel Olam engaged in “eating and drinking”—referring to a lower level of pleasure, not on par with the one derived from scent—all because that was what the *Yidden* offered up.

Rashbi underscored here that **the Ribbono shel Olam loves the Yidden so much; He abandoned all other pleasures and “ate” from their lower level of avodah.** This was a concept that the Ribbono shel Olam wouldn’t reveal to the *neshamos* in the מתיבתא דרקייעא—but Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai perceived it! **That was the depth of Rabbi Shimon’s understanding of Hashem’s love for His children!**

### What Every *Yid* Senses on This Day

In the *piyyut* of Bar Yochai, we say,... ולשדה תפוחים נעשה אדם נאמר בעבורך עלית ללקוט בו מרקחים. Klal Yisrael is likened to apples, as we find in many places in Chazal. Rabbi Shimon, we say, advocated for and so appreciated the depth of every *Yid*—understanding the true purpose of the

creation of man. *Let us make man* was said because of what Rabbi Shimon knew to be true about a *Yid*.

Indeed, we see that *Yidden* throughout the world sense the greatness of a *Yid* on this exalted *hillula*... even if they may not be completely aware of it. Klal Yisrael tends to celebrate the exalted day of Lag BaOmer with great joy and togetherness—because our *neshamos* catch a glimpse of this depth and specialness of *Yidden*, and this in turn brings great joy in *Shamayim*.

### How We Can Tap into This *Avodah* and Merit Illumination

#### Connecting to This *Avodah*

**So, how can we all tap into this exalted worldview of Rashbi?**

We began with the *Zohar HaKadosh* in which Rabbi Shimon testifies that he was tethered to the Ribbono shel Olam for all his life with one tight knot—and therefore merited all these lofty perceptions and revelations.

When does a person merit to understand a concept better, on a deeper level? It is when he relentlessly pursues the mastery of that concept, on a constant basis. We see this in קריאת שמע. The famous question is asked, **how can we be commanded to love Hashem? Love is a feeling...** how can we be commanded to feel an emotion? The answer is that והיו הדברים האלה, *these words must constantly be on our hearts*—eventually transforming our feelings, too, to love Hashem. When a person sits with a connection to the Ribbono shel Olam on an uninterrupted basis, he will eventually attain *deveikus* and love.

This principle applies to attaining פנימיות. Rabbi Shimon remained tethered *constantly*—completely focused on the Ribbono shel Olam. He wasn't in one minute and out the next.

## Constantly Tethered

The Ribbono shel Olam tells every *Yid*: If you will be tethered *constantly*, you will be able to perceive התורה פנימיות more deeply. If you *daven* in the morning, then you idle away some time... you learn a bit, and then you're back out... then you daven Minchah, and again you're shmoozing idly with friends—this will not help you attain the depth you're seeking.

Just as when we seek to boil a pot of water, but we keep turning the heat on and off, we can't expect the water to reach a boiling point—the heat must be sustained—so too, the idea is to be tied and tethered, never letting go. The more a person is tied, the more the inner Torah will be revealed to him, each person according to his level. A person may be tied for two hours... and another person may be connected for five hours. Even when a person goes to eat, he may be thinking about mitzvos that he's performing.... Sometimes a *Yid* remains in this exalted state throughout an entire Yom Tov—constantly going from learning to davening to dancing to rejoicing in Hashem.

We must contemplate a Shabbos in which we experienced heightened and sustained connection for a long period, and what it did for us. Conversely, we can't spend our Shabbos afternoon sleeping and then expect sparks to fly at *shalosh seudos*.

## True Pleasure

The Ribbono shel Olam placed us into a world of Olam HaZeh, and there are forces here that can drag a person to forget about the Ribbono shel Olam. For *years*, a person may go on completing *masechtos* and succeeding in other spiritual milestones—but his successes will be in quantity, not in quality and depth (i.e., increased connection to Hashem). When it comes to eating, for example, this person says, "Leave me alone with your lofty *madreigos*... eating is eating." But the truth is that if a person doesn't work on his תאוות האכילה, his eating becomes an interruption in his connection to the Ribbono shel Olam.

This translates to many other areas of *avodas Hashem*. This person will

constantly interrupt the connection—and there’s thus no way that he can attain *deveikus* and *pnimiyus*.

This work may be difficult at first, but a person must understand that all the great pleasures mentioned in *sifrei kabbalah*, *sifrei chassidus*, *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh*, and so forth—all of them come to a person who works on maintaining a sustained connection across all areas of his life, and they’re infinitely greater than any conceivable material pleasure.

### A Permanent Dwelling for the *Shechinah*

The *Mekubalim* explain the word שכונה—commonly understood to refer to the Presence of Hashem in This World. One of the ideas brought in *Kabbalah*—all of which is rooted in the Torah of Rabbi Shimon—is that the שכונה **refers to a “comfortable” Presence, where it doesn’t seem as if the Presence of Hashem will be chased away** from this place from one moment to the next.

Imagine that a person comes into an unfamiliar shul and sits in the first seat he finds. A few minutes go by, and the person who usually sits there comes along and gently suggests that he should find another place. When this happens twice or three times, this person’s existence in the shul becomes very uncomfortable. This is called שכונת בגלות, *when the Shechinah is in exile*. It doesn’t find a comfortable resting place. שכונה itself refers to a restful, calm Presence.

Explain the *mekubalim* that when the Ribbono shel Olam rests someplace, that very place is transformed. It becomes a place of connection, and this results in great revelations for a person. When an *ehlicher Yid* goes from one mitzvah to the next and from one *avodah* to the next—for weeks, on a sustained level—he creates a resting place in which the *Shechinah* can feel comfortable. This builds upon itself, and new revelations are revealed to this person.

### Refusing to Let Go

Thus, when a *Yid* insists on retaining a sustained connection—he refuses to let go after closing the *Gemara*, he creates a bridge between one

*avodah* and the next, he allows the *Shechinah* to remain with him for just a bit longer each time—then his connection to the Ribbono shel Olam grows. Now he can speak to the Ribbono shel Olam about everything on his heart—now he has encountered the שכינה. Because the *Shechinah* is comfortable remaining with him.

The same applies when a *Yid* recites the entire *Tehillim* without interruption. By the time he comes to *kappitel kuf yud tes* and recites the words דרך שקר הסר ממני ותורתך חנני, he is already tethered...he is connected.

For this reason, the *tzaddikim*, the *talmidei Ba'al Shem Tov*, and *Kabbalah* are filled with this concept; they placed a great emphasis on preparation—preparing a place so that the *Shechinah* will be able to come and rest there. First, one must do *teshuvah*, create a place for the *Shechinah*, and then engage in one's *avodah*. When a person does this, he will experience great revelations of פנימיות in the *avodah* that he is already doing.

## The Reward for Our Toil is Illumination and *Deveikus*

### The Ultimate Reward

The Beis Aharon teaches us on the *pasuk* of אם, בחוקתי תלכו, *if you will follow My decrees*, that the first level in performing a *mitzvah* is as a decree—without understanding or comprehending why we're doing it. Later, we experience the reward, שכר מצוה מצוה, *the reward of a mitzvah is a mitzvah itself*, grasping and connecting with the meaning of the *mitzvah*. **If a person obeys the חוק, the decree, he will be rewarded by connecting with the deeper meaning of the *avodah*.**

And we must know that it is purely a reward for our performing the *mitzvos* with commitment—and that it is *only* the Ribbono shel Olam Who can illuminate these revelations for us: אתה חונן לאדם דעת. **Nothing we will do can really bring us the light—it is purely a gift from Above.**

One of the strongest ways we can bring about this illumination is through sustained connection—בחד קטירא אתקטרנא, *remaining tethered with*

*one sustained knot.* Sometimes, a person regrets that he isn't meriting that דעת—but the Ribbono shel Olam says to him, "You were right there... it was decided in מתיבתא דרקייעא that I will illuminate for you... but then you left just at the moment that I began speaking to you...."

## A Unique Dilemma in Our Generation

This is like a person who struggles to focus. He hears the beginning of the story, but he can't focus through the second part... and he never gets to the end. Similarly, a *Yid* may grab a davening here, the *yahrzeit* of a tzaddik there... here he cries with emotion... but it's never a continued and sustained focus on the Ribbono shel Olam.

Come, we tell him. Sit down. Let us speak with *yishuv hadaas* and peace of mind. This is the only way you will merit illumination.

**In our generation, this issue has become exponentially worse.** Technology has robbed us of all focus, and people don't grasp how much spiritual pleasure they lose out on due to this deficit of *yishuv hada'as*. A person's mind is constantly jumping from one thought to the next.

We don't appreciate how much *Sitra Achara* lies in this—because it robs us of *deveikus* in Hashem! When it comes to learning a *blatt Gemara*, if a person has a good head, he can perhaps get away with being in and out of focus... but **when it comes to *deveikus*, there are no shortcuts! One must be completely present, for a sustained period.**

## Hashem Will Illuminate

Everyone must work on this focus according to his ability, and we must remember that the Ribbono shel Olam assists those who try. He *seeks* to be a מסייע, *to assist us*. **But we must open the door. Take one part of the day and designate it for sustained connection with Hashem.** As a person's world becomes illuminated, he will be able to expand on this.

It's not enough to open this *sefer* and that *sefer*, and to hear a *vort* here and there, as nice as these things are. The mitzvah of ולדבקה בו **is the actual purpose of our existence in This World!**

**Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai revealed to us how this comes about: through sustained connection, בחד קטירא.**

### **Making It Last**

An important aspect of this connection is to meditate upon each mitzvah before performing it. Before a davening, before putting on *tzitzis*, before reciting ...קריאת שמע... take a moment to contemplate what you're about to do.

And once you have already done the mitzvah... once you've finished davening... think about where you're going. There are so many mitzvos that you can fulfill during your day. We must draw out the *deveikus* so it continues to illuminate into our day—even in our eating. This doesn't mean that a person can't enjoy his food. But there are so many mitzvos that a person can meditate upon. There's a mitzvah of נטילת ידים. There's a mitzvah of ברכת המזון and המוציא לחם מן הארץ.

If you think about what you're doing, you're connected to the Ribbono shel Olam! If we think about it, there are mitzvos all around us, opportunities for sustained *deveikus*.

May we be *zoche*—in the *zechus* of the Tanna haEloki Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai—that the Ribbono shel Olam should illuminate for us, and we should merit to become closer to Him!

