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## Contents

תשעה באב

### Rebuilding Yerushalayim with Jewish Hearts.....5

#### The Pain of Distance from the Ribbono shel Olam

Our Deep, Loving Connection with Hashem ❖ Learning from Friendship ❖ Refraining from Things That Hurt the Relationship ❖ Let's Be Honest with Ourselves ❖ Recognizing Our Flaws ❖ A Healthy Connection of a Healthy *Nefesh* ❖ Living with Openness Breeds a Healthy Connection with Hashem ❖ The Ribbono shel Olam Is Our Best Friend ❖ Living Truthfully with Hashem ❖ A "Bias" Not to Do *Aveiros*

#### The "Daughters of Tzion" Also Need to Live with Yerushalayim in Their Hearts

The *Kirvas Elokim* of Yerushalayim Belongs to the Women as Well ❖ Even Busy Mothers Can Be Close to Hashem ❖ Modesty Means Protecting Our Precious *Pnimitiyus* ❖ The Language of the *Song of Songs* ❖ Shabbos with Inner Feeling ❖ He Waits for Us Every Shabbos ❖ If There's No Heart, There Can Be No Yerushalayim

#### It's High Time to Reconnect with Yerushalayim in Our *Neshamos*

Building a Connection with Hashem, Step by Step ❖ Let's Rebuild the Inner Yerushalayim ❖ Every *Yid* Can Discover the "King" Hidden in the Torah ❖ When There's a Blockage, the Electricity Won't Turn On ❖ The Great Lament Over the Sons of Tzion ❖ We Must Cease Living a *Galus* Life ❖ Revealed in the Torah ❖ Inside or Outside ❖ Fear of Losing the Love

Feeling the *Shechinah's* Pain..... 23

**Being Cognizant of Others Enables Us to Feel Their Pain**

The Tragedy When We Don't Even *Recognize* Pain ❖ *Why* Didn't You Notice? ❖ The Greater Offense ❖ Leaving the Confines of "I" ❖ When We Think About Others, We Notice Their Pain ❖  
Entering Their World

**The Tragedy of Being Apathetic to the *Shechinah's* Pain**

Stepping Out of Ourselves to Feel the Mourning of Tzion ❖ The Marriage Demands It ❖ Not Noticing Isn't an Excuse ❖ Developing Closeness with the *Shechinah* ❖ *Tzaddikim* Felt This Way About Their Fellow *Yidden* ❖ Thinking About the *Shechinah*

**Sensing the Suffering of Others**

*Ahavas Yisrael* Means More Than "Not Fighting" ❖ Sensing Suffering ❖ Every *Yid* Can Become Close ❖ Even a Small Thought Changes Our Feelings

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## Rebuilding Yerushalayim with Jewish Hearts

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### The Pain of Distance from the Ribbono shel Olam

#### Our Deep, Loving Connection with Hashem

From the *pesukim* that describe our bond with the Ribbono shel Olam, we learn that this isn't merely a dry and superficial connection, but rather a deep, inner connection that is based on incredible love. This was expressed in the Bais HaMikdash, where the *Keruvim*—which represented Klal Yisrael and the Ribbono shel Olam respectively—were “interwoven with one another.”

If our relationship is likened to one between the closest friends, this means that we can learn from a friendship relationship how to repair the connection that matters most—and how to rebuild Yerushalayim within our hearts.

The reality is that in every close relationship—whether in a marriage or between close friends—there are often problems that arise when one partner says or does something that causes the other to become offended.

It is therefore our lifelong work to ensure the health and wellbeing of our relationships—which is not an easy task, because a person must be able to put aside his ego, his hubris, and his personal biases and motives. He must elevate his entire **בין אדם לחבירו**.

The same applies to our relationship with the Ribbono shel Olam. All 613 mitzvos are designed to build and maintain this relationship—as

the *Zohar HaKadosh* teaches us, the mitzvot are called **עצות**, *solutions*, to maintaining our *deveikus* and connection with the Ribbono shel Olam.

## Learning from Friendship

Each and every mitzvah guides us, in the most real way, to closeness and connection with the Ribbono shel Olam. **Every mitzvah imparts to us a method to *deveikus b'Hashem***—and the same applies to the mitzvot that pertain between one person and another; **they're instructing us regarding our relationship with the Ribbono shel Olam.**

If a person wishes to maintain a good relationship with another person, he must be willing to live with humility and submission... to restrain himself even when he is offended, and to ask forgiveness even when he's in the right.... He must be able to have a broken heart—not the sort that leads to depression and melancholy, but the type that enables us to be humble and focused on others, to be a “giver” and not a “taker.”

**The entire design of these relationships was devised so we will be able to understand the workings of our relationship with the Ribbono shel Olam**—for to live with Yerushalayim within our hearts, we must live with a deeply personal relationship with Hashem. As the Ramban writes, “A *Yid* can merit a level of *deveikus* in Hashem so strong that even when he's conversing with others, he's thinking about the *Aibishter*.”

## Refraining from Things That Hurt the Relationship

If a person learns the rules of interpersonal relationships, and he works on himself to make these relationships successful—he will understand that **all these rules are actually *eitzot* for how to live with closeness to the Ribbono shel Olam!** The same things that interfere with interpersonal relationships **בין אדם לחבירו** also ruin our relationship **בין אדם למקום**, *R"l*.

We must understand that when we do a mitzvah or, *chas v'shalom*, an *aveirah*, it isn't merely a technical action that we did or didn't do—it affects the deep personal connection. For this reason, there are things that

we must and must not do: just as, there are things that interfere with a physical relationship, so too, in our relationship with Hashem, there are things we do that will weaken it.

Although the Ribbono shel Olam is beyond our grasp and comprehension, we must understand that **after committing an aveirah, R"l, we can't simply start davening as though nothing happened.** If you spoke as you shouldn't have, if you hurt another *Yid*, if you caused pain to the Ribbono shel Olam—you can't simply *shuckel* during *Shemoneh Esrei* as you do every other day. Ask forgiveness from your friend... reconcile with the Ribbono shel Olam... do *teshuvah* before you get up to daven.

Tell the Ribbono shel Olam, "I've fallen... help me, Ribbono shel Olam, so that it doesn't happen again... help me repair what I have damaged."

### Let's Be Honest with Ourselves

One of the important principles of interpersonal relationships is that a person must be honest and real with himself—to be honest with his feelings, not to fool himself or hide behind self-constructed walls.

For example, if a person becomes aware that he caused pain to his friend, he should be able to say clearly: "You're right, I made a mistake." This attitude is healthy for the *nefesh*. This person doesn't feel the need to throw blame onto others... he has no problem admitting that he did something wrong and then go on with his life.

If a person isn't healthy in his *nefesh*, he tends to shift his inner pain onto others without justification. Sadly, we see it all the time that people who are in pain lash out at innocent bystanders, who can't figure out how they earned this portion. Everyone wonders: *What do you want from this person?* But the truth is that he's pained over something in his life, and he's expressing his pain by attacking another person.

Conversely, if a person is healthy in his *nefesh*, he's not afraid to tell the truth. "I did something wrong, and this is why I'm in pain." He's not afraid to recognize his weaknesses. **"I'm now in pain because someone**

told me something I didn't appreciate, and my ego is hurt...and this is okay." He analyzes and studies his feelings, and he places them in the proper context... he doesn't allow them to seep into his *nefesh* and weaken it to the point of lashing out at others.

The way to build such a healthy attitude is by keeping track of our thoughts and actions, being careful about where we go and what we do. We're not children who aren't bothered when they become soiled. When we notice a stain, we immediately deal with it. We understand that we had a failure, and we pledge to do everything so that we do not repeat it.

### Recognizing Our Flaws

This *mehalech* in life is essentially a process in *avodas Hashem* that every *Yid* must develop within himself. It is one of the hallmarks of חשבון הנפש, *introspection*, which a person must regularly conduct.

Every time a person realizes that he's sad and downhearted – he feels that he doesn't want to be with other people; that he doesn't have his usual smile – he analyzes it: "What is bothering me?" And when he identifies the cause, he calms himself with *deveikus b'Hashem*. He understands that this was a good cleansing from his ...גאווה it was good for his soul.

If this person isn't yet on the level of drawing strength solely from the *Ribbono shel Olam*, he may unburden himself to a friend – but only to a friend whose heart is permeated with "Yerushalayim." **If he speaks with a person who doesn't live with the Ribbono shel Olam, this person will give him foolish advice** that may only serve to distance him and mire him further in the sludge.

It's a *churban* to consult with a person who will pull the person downward, to *Olam HaZeh*. "You did this, and that happened...." **He should rather listen to a person who will calm him by telling him that everything is from Hashem.** This person will uplift and strengthen him and remind him of the true meaning of life: We have a Creator and everything is good!



## A Healthy Connection of a Healthy *Nefesh*

When a person is in touch with his feelings, he can identify and say: “I felt this way because this person offended me.” This is a healthy *nefesh*. He can live in peace with other people without the relationship being destroyed by every small thing.

This person, who is healthy and properly connected with the Ribbono shel Olam, isn’t easily offended. Every time he encounters a situation of פירוד לבבות, he can calm himself immediately: “There’s nothing to be afraid of... No one can hurt me or take something away from me... אין אדם, *no one can touch anything that has been designated for his fellow*.

**With a little *emunah* and *bitachon*, the entire root of the pain is eliminated—and then he doesn’t have to work so hard to avoid strife and friction, because he’s able to soothe his own feelings.** He has the pleasure of קרבת אלוקים, which is greater than any other joy.

And this was the plan of the Ribbono shel Olam in designing our interpersonal relationships: that we should learn from this that when a person is healthy, he possesses a *bittul* in his *nefesh*, and he can easily admit the truth. He can concede mistakes that he has made. **He doesn’t always need to make silly excuses for everything.** He can speak openly about his flaws. And this is a healthy foundation for relationships with others. This person doesn’t live fenced off from others—he lives truly, honestly, and authentically.

## Living with Openness Breeds a Healthy Connection with Hashem

We must understand that our relationship with the Ribbono shel Olam is built in the same way. We have observed that pained people lash out at those around them without rhyme or reason. Sadly, if they’re unhealthy in their *nefesh*, many people do the same thing toward the Ribbono shel Olam. **The *pesukim* have already discussed the phenomenon of people blaming Hashem for *tzaros* that they have brought upon themselves.**

This comes from a feeling of emptiness within the person, because he hasn't learned and davened properly, and then when the blow inevitably comes, or if someone offends him, he doesn't have the vessels to process it—and he unleashes his frustration on Hashem, instead of building a connection of *kirvas Elokim*.

All the *Yidden* who would come to Yerushalayim to be *oleh regel* lived with incredible love for one another. It was a city of love—because **those who were there erased their complaints and pain against other people**. They offered *korbanos* through which they cleansed themselves of all their negative traits and thoughts, snuffing out foolish issues before they could blow up.

### The Ribbono shel Olam Is Our Best Friend

Every *Yid* can choose to live such a life. **It may be difficult in the beginning—it must be broken through—but afterward life becomes so sweet and pleasurable.** This person isn't beholden to his ego and גאוה, and he doesn't have any hesitation in picking up a phone to a friend and admitting that he made a mistake: "I was wrong; I shouldn't have behaved this way." Sometimes it's true, and sometimes he will say so for the sake of a peaceful relationship.

A *Yid* who lives with a close relationship to the Ribbono shel Olam has the ability to take blame upon himself. He doesn't have the need to twist facts in order to justify himself... **it's fine even if he's wrong.** Because he feels so close to the Ribbono shel Olam, he is fulfilled and satisfied; he doesn't need to be right.

While tzaddikim of yore certainly had friends in their lives, the Ribbono shel Olam was by far the best friend to Whom they felt closest. They didn't need any other friendship. This one was enough for them.

### Living Truthfully with Hashem

A person must become accustomed to building his relationship with Hashem, bolstering the שלום בית in the one relationship that matters more than all. Don't be upset with *Him*! Be truthful with *yourself*! Admit that

you failed, that you didn't want to, but it happened... "Ribbono shel Olam! I know that You love me despite this... help me! Save me from the terrible *yetzer hara*!"

If we have a natural relationship with Hashem, it enables us to live as true and authentic *Yidden*. **The Ribbono shel Olam wants authentic *Yidden*—not robots who go through the motions of doing mitzvos.**

The difference between the two is clearly seen when it comes to certain mitzvos—those that won't build stature or bring recognition to the person. This is when we can see whether a *Yid* is for real, and whether he's doing mitzvos in order to build his relationship with the Ribbono shel Olam.

### A "Bias" Not to Do *Aveiros*

Sometimes, we see that a person commits a terrible *aveirah* over and over, and we wonder: "This is so unbecoming to him!" But the real question is: **"Why doesn't it bother him? How can it be that this *aveirah* doesn't disgust him?!"** The Ribbono shel Olam wants us not even to *want* things that are forbidden to us... we shouldn't even have a תאוה to speak ill of another...--because we will know that this will interfere with our *Shemoneh Esrei* later. We won't be able to connect properly with Hashem.

This person will say: "I have נגיעות, *personal biases*, not to speak badly of a *Yid*. Not because I am a great servant of Hashem—but because I have once done an *aveirah*, and it was very unpleasant afterwards. It took me three days, and a number of immersions in the *mikveh*, until I came back to myself to feel the relationship with Hashem. It simply doesn't pay. I can still recall the Shabbos when I felt dry as a bone, with no feeling for the holiness of Shabbos, after I did something I shouldn't have."

This is what the Ribbono shel Olam wants of us! **This is what it means to rebuild Yerushalayim, and this is really what we lament on Tishah B'Av.** Yerushalayim has dried up. There's no more פנימיות there. If there's no heart there, then there's no "Yerushalayim" there!

## The “Daughters of Tzion” Also Need to Live with Yerushalayim in Their Hearts

### The *Kirvas Elokim* of Yerushalayim Belongs to the Women as Well

When we speak about living with this type of heart for Hashem, we don't just mean the men. It applies just as much to the women of Klal Yisrael. **They need to become *Yidden* of Yerushalayim just as much.**

When we read the *pesukim* and *Midrashim* in *Eichah*, we see many descriptions of the children of Yerushalayim. Chazal speak of their refinement and of their natural connection with the Ribbono shel Olam.

Because the “heart of Yerushalayim” wasn't given only to a *Yid* who has toiled for fifty years in *Shas* and *Poskim*. It was said about every man, woman, and child in Klal Yisrael. If you're a *Yid*, if you have stood at Har Sinai, then this is the true *Yiddishkeit* that the Ribbono shel Olam expects of you. It is for *this* sort of *Yiddishkeit* that you proclaimed נעשה ונשמע. Yerushalayim of old was for *all Yidden*, the women too. They, too, brought offerings in the Beis HaMikdash.

### Even Busy Mothers Can Be Close to Hashem

Often, it happens that mothers are so consumed by caring for their children that they're unable even to daven. Then there are women who carry the burden of *parnassah* so that their husbands scan to learn Torah, and this strains them so much that they're unable to speak to Hashem. **But this is a big problem. It's a *Yiddishkeit* problem.**

We cannot live as true *Yidden* without remembering the Ribbono shel Olam and talking to Him. If we don't live with *kirvas Elokim*, we will automatically fall. Here with anger, here another *nisayon*, and there with another effort to fulfill ourselves because we feel empty. A *Yiddishe neshamah* cannot live at a constant gallop... even if the wife works to support her husband's Torah, she still needs a relationship with Hashem. **If people are solely busy with *hishtadlus* and don't have the basic relationship with Hashem, they're living a life of *galus*.**

Every one of us can find the time and space to speak with Hashem. Sometimes, it requires forgoing other things that we had considered very important—**because we must meet and encounter the Ribbono shel Olam!** The entire *heter* for women not to daven relies on the fact that they're constantly speaking to Hashem in their own language, in their own words.

Where can we find the tears...the tear-soaked *Tehillim* of our grandmothers? How can we inject *Yiddshkeit* into our children if we're not ourselves living with the Ribbono shel Olam?! If we're constantly consumed with "taking care of things" ... a bar mitzvah, a *sheva brachos*, taking people into the house...—as important as these things are—then we're living a superficial and external life. **Every individual Yid must be a פנימיות *neshamah Yid*.** In Yerushalayim, there were men, women, and children—all of whom offered *korbanos* and experienced great *kirvas Elokim* and השראת השכינה. **This is not something we're allowed, or can afford, to forgo!**

### Modesty Means Protecting Our Precious *Pnimitz*

This is the entire essence of the mitzvah of צניעות, which must surely be on the highest standard—to guard over something that is sensitive. We place a protection around something we wish to protect.

**And what is the most precious thing to a Yid? His heart!** The Ribbono shel Olam gave women more feelings, so they will channel them for *kirvas Elokim* without having to endure many of the temptations and desires that men experience. They can more easily attain closeness to Hashem. But if this closeness is missing, then they will be empty and shallow.

The entire lexicon of a *Yid* must abound in words of *emunah* and *bitachon* and *kirvas Elokim*. **This is what the children need to see as they grow up. They must see that their parents derive all of their *chiyus* from closeness to the Ribbono shel Olam.** We have no other choice. This is the only way we can rebuild Yerushalayim—when we draw *chiyus* from the fact that we have davened to Hashem and encountered Him

that day. In this way, we will enter our own Yerushalayim, and only in this way will the Beis HaMikdash be rebuilt.

### The Language of the *Song of Songs*

As noted, this is the idea behind the “Three Oaths,” in which we are enjoined *not* to rebuild Yerushalayim with force—because this is beside the point. Yerushalayim isn’t built with physical strength, but with the fortitude of Jewish hearts.

Where do we find the “Three Oaths”? Precisely in the words of *Shir HaShirim*, which describes the great love between Hashem and His people. The Ribbono shel Olam tells us, “The last thing you should do is to make your way up to Yerushalayim, rebuild it with a tractor, and say, ‘We have Yerushalayim once again.’ This is the precise opposite of the entire point of *Shir HaShirim*, which enjoins us to come closer to Hashem... so that we should have the type of heart that is prepared to give up everything in order to come closer to the Ribbono shel Olam.

### Shabbos with Inner Feeling

When we examine the plethora of reading material that makes its way into Jewish homes over Shabbos, it is sometimes so sad. While some of these publications feature stories of tzaddikim and words of *chizuk*, some of our brothers and sisters read news and other mundane content.

This person says, “I’m not on some lofty level... what am I doing wrong by reading a little news?” **But this is a shame!** The Ribbono shel Olam gave us the gift of Shabbos because He wishes to speak with us and connect with us.

Throughout the week, a person tells the Ribbono shel Olam, “I’m busy and preoccupied... I can’t focus properly because I’m busy.” Says the *Aibishter*: You know what? **I will designate one day when you can tune everything out, and focus on us. I will cover all the expenses of this day, all because I want to encounter you!**

## He Waits for Us Every Shabbos

Let us imagine that a person wishes to speak with his friend. But his friend says, "I'll tell you the truth. I'd love to speak with you, but I am so very busy." Says his friend, 'How much do you earn in a day? Two thousands dollars?! I will pay you 2,000 cash, in order to spend the day with you. We'll go to the water and just talk.... Let's go out and reminisce about good times."

He gives his friend the money, and he waits for his friend at their meeting point. When he does arrive, he takes out a few pamphlets and begins reading.... His friend is incensed. "I called you here to talk and reconnect with you." "Oh," he says, as he looks up from his reading... and then he begins looking around before dozing off.

The Ribbono shel Olam says: **"I gave you a Shabbos because I want to be with you."** On Shabbos there's no *galus*—Shabbos is גאולה. The Tiferes Shlomo (*Shabbos Chazon*) tells us as much, and this is because the Ribbono shel Olam wants us to celebrate and observe Shabbos as though we were in the Beis HaMikdash.

If so, whether we're on the level or not... even if we're not holding there... every *Yid* should understand that this isn't the way to behave on Shabbos Kodesh.

Which *Yid* isn't capable of taking out a *Tehillim* and finishing it over such long Shabbosim? Is there a *Yid* who cannot manage this?!

There are many ways to come closer to the Ribbono shel Olam over a Shabbos. **One person learns a few *blatt* Gemara with *Tosafos*, another person sings שירות ותשבחות and spends time with *Yidden*...** but even if a *Yid* doesn't have a head for learning, he can always turn to his *Tehillim* and speak to Hashem. In fact, the *Sefarim HaKedoshim* teach us that the *Malachim* don't say *shirah* on Shabbos, because this time is reserved for the praises of the Jewish People.

## If There's No Heart, There Can Be No Yerushalayim

Our primary work is to rebuild our connection with the Ribbono shel

Olam! We must inculcate it into our children, and we must speak of it often and live with it: **The Ribbono shel Olam is waiting for us.** He wants *Yidden* who desire to be close to him—*Yidden* who abhor honor and money, and who want the Ribbono shel Olam Himself.

Sadly, when *Yidden* forgot the real Yerushalayim, they fell prey to the worst *aveiros*. This was the greatest indication that they had ceased searching for Hashem. And that was when the Ribbono shel Olam said: **“If so, we don’t need a Beis HaMikdash. We don’t need Yerushalayim. Such a *Yid* can reside in *chutz l’Aretz* as well.”**

I won’t destroy Klal Yisrael, says Hashem. But if this is the *Yiddishkeit* you want, you can’t do it in the Beis HaMikdash. **Here, you can only live a *Shir HaShirim* type of life**—and if you don’t want this, you will need to leave Yerushalayim and live a *chutz l’Aretz* life.

But for how long will we remain in *galus*?! How long will it take for us to get the hint?! Let us recognize the truth—that the Ribbono shel Olam wants us to live with closeness to Him!

### **It’s High Time to Reconnect with Yerushalayim in Our *Neshamos***

#### **Building a Connection with Hashem, Step by Step**

Of course, we cannot attain perfection at once. But every person can begin building his *kesher* with Hashem with small steps. We can take one small action at a time and make it a vessel for closeness to Hashem.

First, everyone can change the way they daven—for this is the essence of davening: to come closer to Hashem. From now on, a *Yid* can resolve never to “fall into” a *tefillah*. He will approach this special time with thought and meditation that he now has the privilege of speaking with Hashem. During davening he will imagine himself speaking directly to the King of Kings.

Another thing that everyone can do is to recite a few chapters of



*Tehillim* every day, thinking about the meaning behind these timeless words—in this way, he will cement his *kesher* with Hashem.

Then there's a *mehalech* in which, even if a person is still mired in *aveiros* and negative habits and traits, he doesn't hide from it. **Even if he doesn't yet have a clear path out of the mud, and he doesn't see how he will become a perfect tzaddik today, he still doesn't hide from Hashem.** He won't pretend that nothing happened—rather, he speaks openly about the matter with the Ribbono shel Olam. "I know that I'm not right... I hope to repair what I have damaged... but I don't yet have the way. Ribbono shel Olam, help me find the way."

### Let's Rebuild the Inner Yerushalayim

A person should meditate that this is what the Ribbono shel Olam wants from him. He wants to be connected with you—both in the things you must do as well as the things you must not do.

The first step in rebuilding the relationship is to recognize and acknowledge what has happened. When we want to bring peace between two people, we sit them down and we ask each one: "Do you understand what happened here? Do you recognize that you've said or done something you shouldn't have?"

The next step is to extricate ourselves from our negative habits. A person must arrive at a level of *not wanting* to do what he must not—not because it's an *aveirah*, but because it will interfere with his *kirvas Elokim*. He will say: **"I know that doing this drags me down. I want it out of my life. It won't allow me to daven properly. I won't be able to celebrate Shabbos with the proper mindset."** The same can apply to the company that one keeps. **"I know that this person puts me in a bad place... his entire talk and comportment are unbefitting, and they are damaging to my *avodas Hashem*."**

Such a *Yid*—a *Yid* who understands that the entire purpose behind all the mitzvos is only to become closer to Hashem—truly laments the loss of Yerushalayim. **He cries when he sees Yerushalayim in ruins.** His own spiritual state is so painful to him: "Look at what spiritual potential

a *Yid* has, and look at where I am. I don't want to look this way. Help me, Ribbono shel Olam, to rebuild Yerushalayim."

Let's begin rebuilding Yerushalayim—the *inner* Yerushalayim, the *מַעֲלֵה יְרוּשָׁלַיִם של מעלה* within the heart of every *Yid*. Let's clean out our hearts with true brokenness and with thoughts of *teshuvah*. Let's take in a bit more Torah and *tefillah*... and other things that may sometimes be difficult, all to purify our hearts. **Let us not just seek the Torah, but what lies within the Torah!** The relationship with Hashem that we can all find in the Torah.

### Every *Yid* Can Discover the "King" Hidden in the Torah

This is the *yesod* that tzaddikim always reiterated: "I want what lies *within* the Torah and *tefillah*."

The *Zohar HaKadosh* (*Parashas Behaalosecha*) compares this to a fool who sees the king's palace and thinks it's the king himself. The wise man, however, recognizes that these are only the walls surrounding the king. As they go further inside the palace and the fool sees the king's royal garments, he assumes that this is the king—but the wise man realizes that this is still not the king—the *חכם* always realizes that the *לבושים*, the outer trappings, are not the essence; **they're only an indication that something special is housed inside.**

A *Yid* who has Yerushalayim in his heart always says: "**I wish to see the King Himself!**" I don't want, after 120 years of life, that people will say that I finished many *masechtos*, or even the entire *Shas*. That's not my end goal! **Of course, if completing *Shas* will bring me closer to the Ribbono shel Olam, I want to know *Shas*.**" But this *Yid* learns Torah because he wants to encounter the Ribbono shel Olam within it!

When he sees words of *mussar* in Chazal, he's immediately drawn to them: "**Ah! These words are so instructive to me... they show me where I have gone wrong—and I don't want to continue living in a mistake. Will I really go on with a life permeated with ego and hubris?!**"

This *Yid* doesn't thrive on superficial fulfillment, and he doesn't need

to be praised by others for the good that he does—because this only detracts from it. **It's a shame. You already invested in doing good, why wouldn't you want to utilize it as an opportunity for closeness with Hashem?**

### When There's a Blockage, the Electricity Won't Turn On

In our times, the Ribbono shel Olam allowed us to understand this concept through the phenomenon of electricity. If we plug a wire into the wall, but there's a piece of paper or plastic covering it, the appliance won't work; it must have a proper connection.

Even if a person learns and davens, but another aspect of his *Yiddishkeit* isn't in order—he's afflicted with anger issues, negative *middos*, forbidden talk, or improper sights—**these are barriers that prevent the light of Hashem from coming to him.**

He may learn and daven, and he may perform mitzvos... but the electricity won't light up—because his *kirvas Elokim* is nonexistent. A life of performing technical mitzvos is a life of *galus*, and we must become redeemed from it. We have no choice. *בכו תבכה בלילה אין לה מנחם, She weeps bitterly in the night [over a life without kirvas Elokim]... she has no comforter [from the great pain of such a life] (Eichah 1:2).*

### The Great Lament Over the Sons of Tzion

The *Navi* laments: *זהב איכה יועם, Alas – the gold is dimmed. ישנא הכתם הטוב, the finest gold is changed. תשתפכנה אבני קודש בראש כל חוצות, Sacred stones are scattered at the head of every street (Eichah 4:1).*

The *Navi* seems to be referring to the beautiful stones of Yerushalayim and the Beis HaMikdash. But the next *pasuk* sheds light on what the *Navi* is really referring to: *בני ציון היקרים המסולאים בפו, the precious children of Tzion who are comparable to fine gold.* The people of Yerushalayim were so precious and elevated—but now: *איכה נחשבו לנבלי חרש מעשה ידי יוצר, alas – they're now treated like earthen jugs.* Look at the way they're behaving... preoccupied with what others think of them. **Is this a child of Tzion?!** This is the greatest indication that they lack *kirvas Elokim*.

If this person derived pleasure from his davening, he would be disgusted by flattery and honor. If he had *kirvas Elokim*, he would abhor all of this foolishness.

If he would have a taste in *Shemoneh Esrei*, it would bother him very little what others say, and if someone would offend him, it wouldn't hurt him at all. If someone would embarrass him, it wouldn't require *קבלת יסורים באהבה*—and he wouldn't even feel like his sins are now being forgiven. It would simply not affect him very much. For why would he care what someone else says when he's now coming from an audience with the Ribbono shel Olam! His *nefesh* is filled with *deveikus* in Hashem, which is so much stronger than all of the silliness around him.

### We Must Cease Living a *Galus* Life

The Ribbono shel Olam gifted us with His Torah and with His mitzvos. They're "a tree of life for those who grasp them," and "the Torah's ways are sweet and pleasurable." This means that there's no greater pleasure than a life of Torah and mitzvos!

The Torah speaks to every *Yid* and says: *כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאוד בפֿיך*, *The matter is very close to you, and the ability is in your mouth and heart to accomplish it.* Start doing! *Close to you* doesn't mean that the *Gemara* is accessible to you—but that the *Ribbono shel Olam* is within reach! The essence of *Yiddishkeit* is close to us.

We must simply stop living *galus'dig* and begin thinking about what's important in life. We must remember what it is that Hashem really wants from us—that we should feel such closeness that even when we feel distant, we should immediately want to escape to Him. *ה' עוזי ומנוס לי*, *Hashem is my strength and my escape!* When we have a problem, there's nowhere else that we should run but to Hashem.

### Revealed in the Torah

The Ribbono shel Olam reveals himself to every *Yid* through the Torah. He placed Himself into the letters of the Torah, as Chazal said (*Shabbos* 105a), the letters of *אנכי* make up the first letters of the words, "I have

written Myself and given Myself.” That is, Hashem wrote Himself into the Torah and has given Himself to the *Yidden*).“

Some people mistakenly think that this is some esoteric idea that is above us. But the *Ribbono shel Olam* revealed this to us because He wanted us to understand that this isn’t an esoteric concept: **“You will find Me in the Torah! You will see Me with your own eyes!”**

When a person learns *Torah lishmah*—even at the most basic level, with a desire to become close to Hashem and to purify his *neshamah*—**he will encounter the Ribbono shel Olam there!** The *Ribbono shel Olam* will ensure that he will find in his learning the cures for what ails his *neshamah*. He will actually wonder: “How is it that I *happened* to have found *just this* passage in the Gemara or Rashi which my soul so needed? Ah... the *Ribbono shel Olam* knows my flaws well.” **He will encounter the Ribbono shel Olam in his *siddur*, in his *Chumash* or Gemara—everywhere, he will find the right way to be an *ehrliche Yid*.**

Later, his entire personality will change, and his entire attitude and approach to people will change as well. Does it mean that he will never fail again? Of course not. As long as he finds himself on This World, he will have to contend with his *yetzer hara*. But **he will no longer be standing outside of Yerushalayim**. He speaks with the *Ribbono shel Olam* and he offers Him *korbanos*. He says to Hashem, “Today, I had an improper thought. I must bring a *korban Olah*... may it be as though I have offered an *Olah*.”

### Inside or Outside

This is likened to two people who learn a *sugya* in Gemara. For one person it goes swimmingly... he’s into it... but occasionally he strays from the *peshat*. Then there’s another person who’s quite obviously not even here. He’s simply not in the *sugya*.

The same applies to the *sugya* of Yerushalayim. There are people who are adjacent to *Yiddishkeit*...they perform the mitzvot that they must—but they’re not *in it!* **They’re not in Yerushalayim**. The *Ribbono shel*

Olam asks of us a *פנימיות Yiddishkeit*, and when we live such a *Yiddishkeit*, Yerushalayim will be rebuilt.

This isn't a *segulah* or something that says in a *sefer*—it is the essence of what it means to be a *Yid*: wanting *Yiddishkeit* for the connection to Hashem, and fearing evil because it will interrupt this *kesher*.

### Fear of Losing the Love

This is what tzaddikim have taught us: True *yiras Hashem* is our **fear that we will lose the loving connection** with Hashem! And everyone can attain this; men, women, and even small children. While it is something that requires *דעת*, for connection requires wisdom, everyone can attain it according to their level. No one is exempt from tending to this connection. No *Yid* should have an emptiness in his heart!

May the Ribbono shel Olam help us to merit building the Beis HaMikdash—for He is waiting for us! **The love that the Aibishter has for all of us cannot be fathomed**—especially on the day of Tishah b'Av, in which is concealed the *אורו של משיח*, *the light of Mashiach*.

May the Ribbono shel Olam help us to raise ourselves up to be closer to Him. He will surely accept us and redeem us from the terrible *galus*. Then, we will surely see how close we can become to encountering the Ribbono shel Olam. It will be such a joy and pleasure. **The entire creation will become elevated when Yidden return to the Ribbono shel Olam**. Everyone can arrive at this *teshuvah* from the place that they are. Everyone can cry out to be brought closer. He will surely be heard, and the Ribbono shel Olam will give him the *siyata diShmaya* until we will finally come to the Beis HaMikdash, where we will encounter the Ribbono shel Olam once again.



## Feeling the *Shechinah's* Pain

### Being Cognizant of Others Enables Us to Feel Their Pain

#### The Tragedy When We Don't Even *Recognize* Pain

*Megillas Shir HaShirim* elaborates greatly upon the tremendous bond between the Ribbono shel Olam and *Knesses Yisrael*, the Jewish People. It compares this relationship to the most intimate bond between a man and his wife, but in the deepest, most spiritual way. The *pesukim* draw on these metaphors so we will be able to grasp the idea of the great closeness that exists between us.

Sometimes, it happens that someone goes through a hard time, but **spouse is completely oblivious to their pain...** he comes and goes, happy and content, completely unaware that his partner is enduring terrible emotional pain.

He doesn't wish to be mean. If he were aware of it, he would surely offer to help in any way he could—but **the problem here is that he's completely oblivious to the pain that someone so close to him is going through.**

#### *Why* Didn't You Notice?

This only compounds the pain for the spouse. Not only is she suffering as a result of the problem she's experiencing—she's also alone in her pain; it isn't noticed even by those closest to her. **Why didn't you even notice? How can it be that you didn't see anything?**

When you confront this spouse, you will tell him that when his wife is under duress, you shouldn't go out at night, because you need to be there for her. One needs to be much more present in that situation, and he needs to help out at home much more. Chazal exhorts us to take extra care with the feeling of our wives, for their tears are frequent (see *Bava Metzia* 59a).

But this person will answer you, "Of course, I would do anything to alleviate her pain, but **it didn't even occur to me that something is amiss. I simply didn't realize....**" This man is a nice person, and he doesn't mean to be hurtful. He simply didn't realize.... **This itself is a tremendous question. Why he didn't notice...? Why wasn't he aware...? He should have noticed!**

### The Greater Offense

Sometimes, a person feels himself completely innocent for not having noticed the pain of another. He doesn't feel responsible for that pain, since all that happened was that he didn't notice it. "I'm not cruel. I didn't hurt him outright...."

But this is a mistake—and the greatest indication of this is that your apathy caused the person so much more pain. Interpersonal relationships—like everything in this world—work according to rules... and the rules dictate that **a person's pain will be greatly compounded when people are oblivious to it.**

### Leaving the Confines of "I"

The *Ribbono shel Olam* wanted—and this is how He arranged Creation—for people not to be preoccupied with themselves alone. A person must look outside the confines of his self to see what's happening around him.

A *Yid* who's aware, and who cares about others, will automatically notice many more things around him. He may notice a little boy in shul who seems sad, and he'll inquire about what's bothering him. A second person will wonder, "How did you even notice?" But to him, it's obvious. He notices other people and their pain.



The difference between the two isn't that one can read minds and the other can't. The difference is that the first person is consumed only with himself: He runs into Minchah while he's in middle of making money, and he asks Hashem to help him make even more money... he says *Aleinu* at the conclusion of davening because it's a *segulah* for making money—all the while checking his phone to see whether someone has called him back yet. If so, **if his head is immersed only in himself, how could he possibly be aware of someone else's pain.** There's no way that he would notice.

### When We Think About Others, We Notice Their Pain

However, when a *Yid* comes into shul thinking about how he can help another person... *how can I do something good?* ... he comes into shul and he's *looking* for someone to whom to give tzedakah, and he finds a *Yid*: **"This person seems to be a little down... he doesn't look good... what's the story with him?"** He immediately goes over to him and asks him warmly: **"Maybe I can help you with something?"**

This *Yid* walks into shul and he's looking to share a kind word with another person.... *With whom can I share words of chizuk?* And when a person thinks about others, he will notice things. He will feel their pain, and he'll understand them and feel them.

### Entering Their World

A *Yid* who walks around thinking about others is completely devoted to helping others in their dilemmas. It's like a person who resolved to go visit a patient in the hospital to give him strength and *chizuk*. He goes through the entire trip just to give of himself to a sick person, to care for him and to make him comfortable. He wants to lift up his spirits and put a smile on his face. **He has come with a purpose: to place himself into another person's situation.**

The same applies to a person who walks around thinking about other people. He automatically picks things up. He understands when people need help, and he can truly be of great assistance to them.

Conversely, a person who lives in his own world **won't understand other people, and he won't be aware of their challenges.** Even when someone shares their problems with him and he listens to him, he's really thinking: *You're disturbing me... I had things I wanted to do now.... this wasn't on my agenda....*

## The Tragedy of Being Apathetic to the *Shechinah's* Pain

### Stepping Out of Ourselves to Feel the Mourning of Tzion

All of this is merely a parable to the important pain that we must all feel in these days—the *צער השכינה*, which is especially acute at this time of the year. Sadly, we don't sufficiently feel the pain of the *Ribbono shel Olam*, and this is itself a great indictment. When a *Yid* says that he didn't feel the pain, the question is *why not, indeed?* Where does your apathy to the *צער השכינה* stem from?

This person walks around during the days of *בין המצרים*, and everything is just fine and dandy. It's the Nine Days, but soon after Tishah B'Av, we will relax and vacation. It's already good, but it will be even better.... Why doesn't he feel the pain? **Because he thinks only about himself all day!** He thinks about himself and his successes and his goals.

When he hears that the *Ribbono shel Olam* is in pain, he will at best say: "Okay, how much money is needed here? I'll give you money, but don't bother me... and don't disturb my summer vacation with this." He's so deeply immersed in his own world that he can't possibly feel anyone else's pain. **And this itself is the greatest *טענה* on us!**

### The Marriage Demands It

If a person weren't married, then the complaint against him isn't so great. But if he has stood under the *chuppah* and he's nevertheless oblivious to the pain of his spouse, it shows terrible negligence on his part. This person has obligations to his spouse, and these cover emotional needs as well. **His heart and his mind must be present at home.** He

must be completely aware of what is happening there. He must sense when something is amiss, and if he doesn't, then something isn't right with the marriage.

If a person is so preoccupied with his *parnassah* or with other things, and he doesn't realize what's happening in front of his face, **it is a great failure in his marital obligations.** And indeed, such obliviousness is very often found in broken marriages, which bring so much pain, aggravation, and even worse.

**Every Yid stood under the chuppah at Har Sinai.** The Ribbono shel Olam selected us and chose us to be close to Him. **A close person must be able to feel what is happening right next to him!**

### Not Noticing Isn't an Excuse

When a child is struggling, his parents must be able to notice it before it's too late. Similarly, a good rebbi must likewise be able to notice when a child is struggling. He may say, "I just realized that there's been a problem for six months, but how should I have realized...? Incidentally, he did well on tests...."

But **this is the problem!** Why do you associate with him only when he's taking tests. **Why don't you have a deeper connection with the child?** If you'd developed a connection and love with the child, you would've immediately recognized that something is amiss with him. You would have realized, "Even if I can't identify it, and the child is learning well, but he's not the same... his heart isn't here...."

### Developing Closeness with the *Shechinah*

The same applies to our relationship with the Ribbono shel Olam, as it were. אני לדודי ודודי לי—Hashem wants us to feel along with His pain. **A Yid must be able to shed a tear because of the pain of the Ribbono shel Olam.**

But these emotions of empathy with the צער השכינה can come to a person only after he thinks about the *Shechinah* in general! The relationship

must be cultivated in the first place before one can feel the *Shechinah's* pain. Once a person feels close to another, he will shed a tear over his pain.

### *Tzaddikim Felt This Way About Their Fellow Yidden*

We find that tzaddikim related this way to their fellow *Yidden*. If *Yidden* would come in to unburden their hearts—even if it was the first time the tzaddikim encountered them—it was natural for the tzaddikim to be able to feel their pain and cry along with them.

Where did this come from? The tzaddik may not have known this person, his challenge, his suffering, and his history, **but tzaddikim always davened for their fellow Yidden. They thought about their brethren and they were connected to them**, and so, if a *Yid* felt pain, they felt it keenly, because they felt so close to them.

### *Thinking About the Shechinah*

The *Ribbono shel Olam* wants a *Yid* to begin thinking about the *Shechinah*. When we begin davening, or we sit down to learn, **we should forget about ourselves for a bit, and think about the Shechinah**. No one needs to know about it—but we need to think: **What can I do for *kevod Shamayim*, to bring pleasure to the Ribbono shel Olam?** Maybe I can give *tzedakah* in a hidden manner so that even the recipient isn't aware of it? This is one way of doing something for the *Shechinah*.

A *Yid* may think during davening that the *Shechinah* should be brought joy. When a person engages in bringing joy to a *chassan* and *kallah*, and he knows that the *Shechinah* is present, he may think about bringing joy to the *Shechinah*.

The *yetzer hara* wants the opposite; he wants us to be so consumed with ourselves that we can't even notice what kind of pain the *Shechinah* finds itself in.

But when a *Yid* thinks about the *Ribbono shel Olam*, he strives to be close and bring joy to the *Shechinah*, then, **when he hears that Hashem**

is in pain, he also becomes pained. When he sees things in the world that illustrate the *Shechinah's* pain and exile, he has the sensitivity to feel it too. He is close to it, and this awakens in him inner feelings to experience along with the pain of the *Shechinah*.

## Sensing the Suffering of Others

### *Ahavas Yisrael Means More Than “Not Fighting”*

The same idea is true with regard to loving other *Yidden*. We know that in these days of *בין המצרים*, it is especially important to work on our *ahavas Yisrael*, to rectify the *שנאת חנם* that brought about the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash.

Sometimes, a *Yid* will say, “How can I work on my *ahavas Yisrael*? What more can I do. I can honestly say that I don’t have arguments or disputes with *anyone!*” But *אהבת ישראל*, loving a fellow *Yid*, means much more than simply not arguing or fighting. One of the simplest illustrations of *ahavas Yisrael* is when we notice and think about what others are going through.

### Sensing Suffering

We ask him, “Didn’t you know that this person is going through a very rough time?” He may say, “No, he never shared it with me.” This is understandable... maybe we’re not expected to know every detail of their lives. **But why didn’t you sense that he’s suffering?** Generally, if a person isn’t *completely* preoccupied with his own needs, it is easy to notice when others are suffering. We don’t need to hear or speak *lashon hara* and gossip for this; anyone with a *Yiddishe* heart can sense it.

This is how it works; sensitive Jewish hearts recognize the suffering of others. They may not know all the details, but they feel it, and they’re motivated to do something about it.

### Every *Yid* Can Become Close

When a person notices others and pays attention to what they are

feeling, he has already helped them in a big way. He has given them his heart. He empathized and commiserated... he felt along with their pain.

The same happens when a *Yid* thinks about the Ribbono shel Olam. He is automatically able to shed a tear during davening.... When he says מִמְּקוֹמְךָ מַלְכֵנוּ תוֹפִיעַ, *from Your place, our King, You will appear*, he feels the כִּי מַחֲכִים אֲנַחְנוּ לָךְ, *for we wait for You*. We so desperately await You! This person is *here*.... He is involved with the problem.

Many times, when people hear bad news, they won't be overcome too much if it affects someone they don't know. A close person *will* become affected. And so, a *Yid* who feels close to the Ribbono shel Olam must become moved when the Ribbono shel Olam is in pain. It hurts him personally.

### Even a Small Thought Changes Our Feelings

Sadly, the Ribbono shel Olam gives us many opportunities to feel the pain of fellow *Yidden*. **All this is a mirror to the great pain that the Ribbono shel Olam experiences every day**, as it were.

A *Yid* can and must become close to Hashem and to His pain. We can build up our relationship with Him through reciting *tehillim* or davening—especially when we have in mind that we want to bring gladness and pleasure to the *Shechinah*. Through this, we will merit to feel the *pain* of the *Shechinah*. We will stop thinking so much about our own matters and successes, and instead begin thinking strongly about how we can bring joy and gladness to the *Shechinah HaKedoshah*.

