

P A R T F O U R

V5 REVISED [05.02.2017]

BUILDING

A Sanctuary In The Heart

HISBODDEDUS AND RATZON
MEDITATION & WILLPOWER

A STRUCTURED PROGRAM FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

UNEDITED SPECIAL INTERNET EDITION

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Editor's Introduction

“*Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*” (“Building A Sanctuary In The Heart”) **Part 4** is a fully integrated program for self-improvement for those who are seeking to serve the Creator. It is for the serious-minded and aspiring individual, who is familiar with the Rav’s style. This volume is a collection of 21 classes which the author delivered in 5764, and it was actually the first series of classes which the author delivered to a public audience.

This particular volume is more intense in its nature, and it should be regarded as a continuation of the first two volumes of *Bilvavi*. It focuses on two central points in our *Avodas Hashem*: how to make proper *hisbodedus*/meditation (which includes the *avodah* of “*cheshbon hanefesh*”, making a self-accounting), and how to develop a *ratzon*/willpower for holiness. The goal is to attain a more genuine relationship with Hashem throughout our daily life, our *davening*, and our Torah learning; the concept of *temimus* (simple earnestness) is also covered along the way. The chapters are meant to be read in order, as each chapter is built upon the concepts of the one before it.

In **Section One**, the author brings our life to a halt and reminds us that we have a Father in heaven, Whom we need to initiate a relationship with, just as a father longs for his son to come close to him. Then, we are told that we need to plan out and structure our service to Him, as opposed to just getting inspiration here and there. The author believes that the way to do this is by setting aside time for *hisbodedus*/meditation – and this merits a few chapters of its own, as it is a subject in dire need of guidance.

The chapters then continue on to discuss other central aspects in our *Avodas Hashem*, such as gaining *temimus*/simplicity, acting *lishmah*/for the sake of Heaven, and the need to keep thinking of the purpose of why we live.

Section Two is built upon its predecessor. It devotes an entire eight chapters solely to how we can develop a central ability in our soul, the power of *ratzon*/willpower. It is a path toward honest change.

If anyone is for a program of growth and self-improvement, *Bilvavi Volume IV* should be seriously read and studied. Anyone who contemplates these instructions given here will discover that this is not only a self-help book in the practical sense, but a *sefer* that will give your whole life new meaning. Even more so, it can be the *sefer* that truly brings us closer to our Creator – leading us through our journey towards G-d that we began in the previous volumes.

May this *sefer* be of true help to those who are searching to deepen their relationship with Hashem and are prepared to commit themselves to the truths contained in these pages.

Author's Introduction

In everything, there are general rules, as well as the details. When it comes to serving Hashem, this is true as well. There are rules, and there are details, in serving Hashem.

At the beginning of a person's way, it is impossible for a person to know what the rules of serving Hashem are, and what details it will entail. It is almost definite that a person will confuse the details and the rules, and the rules with the details.

Therefore, in order to give a person the picture in which he can see the rules first, the Ramchal writes in the beginning of *sefer Mesillas Yesharim* what the greatest rule is. The greatest rule, he writes, is that the purpose of man on this world is to become close to the Creator. When a person understands this, he looks at everything through the lens of *d'veykus* (attachment to Hashem): "How will this bring me to have *d'veykus* in Hashem?"

It's possible that a person thinks that he has many things to work on in *Avodas Hashem*, and he is aware of all kinds of wonderful advice to work on many areas, yet he's still missing the knowledge about the general rule, which is the purpose of it all. The truth, though, is that the Zohar states that the 613 *mitzvos* are called "advice", because the *mitzvos* are all advice on how to get to the goal, which is *d'veykus* in Hashem.

When a person builds up his attitude and way of thought in this way, he is reaching the root of the redemption, and now it is upon him to shine the light of that personal redemption – the light of *d'veykus* – onto all the details of *Avodas Hashem*.

One who learns this *sefer* should know that this is the outlook that should accompany the learning of this *sefer*, and that this *sefer* was written based on that outlook.



In the previous *sefarim*, it was explained the order of steps in *Avodas Hashem*. Now, in this volume, we have devoted our discussion on *Avodas Hashem* to the specific topics: *hisbonenus*,

which is to reflect with oneself during times of quiet, *hisbodedus*/meditation, and building our power of *ratzon* (will).

We should stress the fact that the matters of this *sefer* are really based on the inner wisdom of Torah, but it has been watered down to our language.

Thus, these matters have to be learned in-depth. They are not meant to be mere inspiration. Through learning these matters in-depth, the soul can become inspired as a result, though. Even more so, if a person accepts these matters with his simple *temimus* (wholeheartedness), he will merit *d'veykus*, as it is written, “*You shall be wholesome with Hashem, your G-d.*” If you have *temimus* - if you believe wholeheartedly in Hashem, then you are essentially “with” Hashem as well.



Let us end off with a prayer: May no mistakes come from this endeavor, and may the words be accepted by the hearts of those who learn it, and may *Klal Yisrael* merit to be attached to the Creator, at all times.

PART 1

Reflecting

1.1 | *Recognizing Our Father In Heaven*

The Common Goal of Every Jew

The most basic point that there is in life is the simple recognition of “*Ain Od Milvado*” – “There is nothing besides Hashem.”

This is the goal which every Jew should be headed towards. This has been our purpose ever since the creation of the first man. The ways to get to this goal differ with every individual. Sometimes the way to get there is more opened, and sometimes it is difficult and closed up. There are always tests and failures in life. But no matter what, there is one point which must always be in front of our eyes: We must strive to get to Hashem.

There are many actions we must do – Torah, Tefillah, mitzvos, etc. But the purpose of all of them is only one point: to find Hashem.

“We Are Orphans With No Father”

We all know that we have to search for G-d in our life, but what isn't so clear to us is how to search for Him. Where can we find G-d?

It is clear that Hashem is found everywhere. The only issue is how much each Jew feels that He is next to him, how much he feels Him in his heart.

It's possible that a person is learning Torah, *davening*, and doing all the *mitzvos* – yet he can still be far from the goal. Even if he isn't far, he needs to always ask himself how close he really is to the goal.

When it comes to spiritual matters, it's not possible to say, “I'm already close to Hashem.” Although it's possible that one is close to Hashem, there is no end to the closeness attainable, and thus one should never be satisfied. When it comes to physical matters, you can say, “I have enough”, but when it comes to spirituality, there is never enough. Hashem said “Enough” to the world to end Creation, but that was only to the physical creation. There is no end to *ruchniyus* (spirituality), and one has to always seek it. Even when a person feels Hashem, he has to be able to feel Him even more – not just more often, but on a more inner level.

There is a *possuk* in Eichah (5:3), “*We are orphans, with no father*”. This is an amazing description of the life of a Jew who goes his whole life on this world and never feels Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

The first part of the *possuk* says, “*We are orphans.*” We know that an orphan is someone without a father, but if you think about it, even an orphan has a father. Every orphan has a father, because if he wouldn’t have had a father, how could he come into existence? It is just that an orphan doesn’t see his father, and that is why he is called an orphan. His father has passed away and is in heaven, while he is on earth, and he doesn’t see him.

The lesson from this is to all of us. Hashem is also in the heavens, while we are on the earth. “*For G-d is in heaven, while you are on the earth.*” (Koheles 5:1). Since this is so, a person can feel sort of like an orphan. When a person feels that his Father, Hashem, is up in heaven while he is down below on earth and so far from him, this makes a person feel like an orphan. It is exactly like an orphan, who really has a father (in heaven) whom he can’t see. This is the meaning of “*we are orphans.*”

The second part of the *possuk* says, “*with no father*”. This is another point, and it is a deeper kind of problem.

Every orphan longs for his father. Even if he never gets to see his father, he sees how others have a father, and he knows that he must have a father of his own somewhere. He knows that there is a wonderful relationship that a father and son have with each other, and this makes him yearn even more for a father. But unfortunately, there are some people who think that “no father” means to simply not have a father, and thus there are orphans who learn how to deal with the situation of not having a father. The result from this is detrimental, because they don’t know that there is such a concept as a father.

The lesson from this to all of us is that a Jew may not even recognize that he has a Father. It’s almost as if he thinks he was born on his own, without a Creator. Of course, nobody will be an open heretic and deny that there is a Creator, and everyone knows in their mind that there is a Creator. But it’s the feeling of it that is missing – when a Jew doesn’t feel that he has a Father, he goes through life like an orphan.

It’s possible that a Jew will go his whole life and keep all of the Torah, and he listens to all the rabbis and does everything he is told to do, yet he still feels like an “orphan.” He doesn’t feel how Hashem is his father. He might even feel even worse, that he has “no father”...

How To Change Our Attitude

The question is: How do we get to that point? How can we uproot this “orphan” attitude we have towards Hashem? And for those of us who we don’t actually feel like orphans, how can we at least strengthen our relationship with Hashem at all times?

Without a shadow of a doubt, a person has to learn Torah and keep all the mitzvos. We are not coming to detract from this in any way. But alas, our eyes can all see that although people learn

Torah and keep the mitzvos, this doesn't give more awareness to a person that Hashem is watching over him more. There is a kind of learning Torah which draws a person closer to Hashem, but there is also learning which doesn't create a feeling of closeness with Hashem. So learning Torah doesn't necessarily draw a person close to Hashem.

The same goes for *davening* (prayer) as well. When a person *davens*, he is supposed to feel that he is talking to his Father in heaven, Who created him and runs his life. However, people *daven* all the time and they do not feel this closeness.

We can explain this problem from the following parable, which is a simple example in life. Let's think what it means for a person to have a father. Someone with a father doesn't always live with him in the same house. Children get married and often live in different countries than their parents. If a son is distant from his father, what can he do to maintain a bond with him?

Hashem helps us for this and made it possible for people to write letters to each other. Now we have telephones and we can even hear our father's voice even when we are far away. Even more recently, there is voicemail, and now people don't even have to talk to their father – they just leave a voice message on the phone and when the father wants, he can choose to listen to it.

Imagine a child gets married and lives far away from his father, and he wants to keep up his bond with his father. He lives a message on his father's answering machine that he wants to get together with him – but his call never gets returned. He leaves several messages on his father's machine, but his father never calls him back. He begins to wonder: Maybe something is wrong with the system? Maybe the phone number has changed? Even worse, maybe something happened to his father...?

From this parable, we can learn about our own situation when it comes to our relationship with Hashem. A person davens three times to Hashem, as Chazal enacted, but often, he is just leaving "messages" for Hashem: I need this, I need that. "I need understanding, health, livelihood, mercy on Jerusalem, etc." For some reason, he isn't getting back an answer. Maybe he should ask himself, though, if maybe something is wrong with his 'answering machine'!

In other words, before a person wonders why Hashem isn't answer his prayers, he should first ask himself if he is communicating properly with Hashem. A person should ask himself: "Do I have a personal relationship with Hashem, or am I just leaving messages on the 'answering machine' and waiting for Him to get back to me...?"

These are two totally different ways of communicating with Hashem. If a person really checks himself (and most people will indeed find this is true), he would realize that he is usually concerned about his own personal welfare, and the way he talks to Hashem is thus dry and lacking any real feeling. Compare this to the difference between someone talking on a phone to

someone who's leaving a message on the voicemail. When a person talks to another on the phone, his voice is full of life and excitement.

Sometimes when people make international calls, they have to scream into the phone. Is this because the connection is bad? No – it's because since the other person is so far away, the caller feels a need to yell louder into the phone so he can hear him better. This parable helps us understand a statement in Chazal that one should not daven *Shemoneh Esrei* loudly. If a person would really feel that Hashem is beside him, he wouldn't need to raise his voice so that Hashem will hear him. Why does a person daven loudly? It must be that he thinks that Hashem is so far from him...

The people of Ninveh, when they were in danger, "*called out mightily to Hashem*". The Kotzker Rebbe zt"l said that this is the non-Jewish attitude – that you have to yell to G-d in order to be heard. When a person is at the true level, he knows that "Hashem is not found in a noise, but in a *kol demamah dakkah* (soft, subtle voice)." A person needs to realize that Hashem is found right next to him.

"And you shall seek Hashem your G-d and find Him, for you have searched for Him with all your heart and all your soul." Every Jew must seek only Hashem – to want that Hashem be found next to him, at any moment.

Recognizing Hashem In Our Life

Is there any one of us who wants to end life without ever feeling Hashem?

Feeling Hashem in your life doesn't happen by itself, no matter how long you live. If a person doesn't work with all his strength to reach closeness with Hashem, he will go his whole life and never even taste this awesome feeling.

Of course, even if a person never feels Hashem in his life, he will still get rewarded in Gan Eden for all his learning Torah and doing all the *mitzvos*. But when Hashem reveals Himself to the world in the future, and all the *tzaddikim* are pointing to Hashem, saying, "This is Hashem Whom I hoped for", a person who hasn't felt Hashem in his life won't be clear about who Hashem is, and he won't be able to point to Hashem with that clear recognition.

Only someone who already recognized Hashem in his own life will be able to point with all the *tzaddikim* and say, "This is Hashem." He searched for Hashem, so he can recognize Hashem when Hashem will reveal Himself. He never saw Hashem physically – He saw Hashem in his heart, and he felt His reality.

But without recognizing Hashem beforehand, a person will not be clear in the future that Hashem is revealing Himself! He will say, "Who says this is Hashem?"

We must be able to recognize Hashem already on this world, and without this, we are very far from the purpose of creation. Without this recognition, maybe a person won't go to Gehinnom, but he never reaches the purpose of creation.

We must recognize Hashem, not only intellectually, but to feel Him. The *Chovos HaLevovos* describes this ability as “eyes of the intellect” (*einei haseichel*).

May each of us recognize the Creator and truly come close to Him.

1.2 | *Building Ourselves*

Introduction

In the coming chapters, we will bring many ways how to serve Hashem, but before we approach them, we should first give a general introduction that is very important, if we want to gain from the guidance here.

There is a well-known story told about Reb Zalman of Volozhin, the brother of Rav Chaim Volozhiner, student of the Vilna Gaon. Once the Vilna Gaon was giving a shiur, and Reb Zalman asked him to stop in middle. The Vilna Gaon asked him, “Why do you wish me to stop? Is the Torah not precious to you?”

Reb Zalman replied, “To the contrary, because they are so precious to me, I want them to last. I still haven’t internalized yesterday’s lesson, and if I hear new things today, then I will forget yesterday’s learning, and it will be long gone.”

He was saying a very important lesson. When you hear something, first think about it, and only then can you add onto that knowledge.

If a person lights two Menorah lights on the second night of Chanukah and then he extinguishes the first light, he never got to the second light, and whatever he adds on after that is nothing, because the first light never remained. The same applies with *Avodas* Hashem. When we hear about a certain point we need to work on, first we have to make sure we acquire it well, and then we can continue to the next point to work on.

Practice What You Learn

The Torah is called “Torah” from the word *horaah*, which means “ruling.” The Torah shows a person the proper way to serve Hashem. When a person learns Torah, the *halacha* is the goal. *Halacha* means “to go” – when a person actually goes in the way of Torah and lives his life accordingly, it is then that the Torah is absorbed in him and it becomes a Torah of life.

In order for a person to build himself, he needs to take the Torah’s knowledge and live by it, to practice it. He needs to think into it.

The amount that each person needs to think into it differs with each person. The Torah is the light that shows a person the path. But not every path is the same. Some paths need more time to be on, and some less. There are many paths to take that are all from the Torah, but not every path is for every situation. There are points which we need to work on, but there are some points

which are detrimental to work on, and those points need to be put side to work on at a different time.

The words of this *sefer*, although they are written in this order, should be used sensibly. Every matter in this *sefer* has its rightful time and place, as Koheles (3:1) says. Each of the points delineated in this *sefer* can only be practiced depending on if you're able to, if you have the strength for it. If you don't have the energy for the matters in this *sefer*, then working on these points will only prove detrimental.

Inspiring Yourself vs. Building Yourself

Generally speaking, there are two points necessary in serving Hashem. One point is *binyan*, building yourself up through a careful plan. The other point is *hisorerus*, inspiring yourself.

Avodas Hashem needs to be built up with a careful plan, step after step. Therefore, time shouldn't be an issue, and we need to be patient with each step of the way. The main thing we should want here is to have a true, founded plan to work with, and our time is required for this. You will thus have to set aside time to work on the matters here. That is one point, and it is the basis.

Another point we need together with this is that we will need to inspire ourselves from time to time. It is written, *"I am asleep, but my heart is awake."* We need to use our heart, which is awake, to affect our sleep-like state.

If a person is at a high spiritual level already, he knows how to awaken himself from within himself. He knows how to use his heart to awaken himself, because he has purified his heart. He hears the "Heavenly voice" from inside himself.

But for someone who isn't on that level, he needs to get inspiration from an outside source. This leads to problems, though, because when a person seeks inspiration from outside himself, it leads to much confusion.

We have said that there are two points we need to make use of: *binyan* and *hisorerus*. *Binyan* is to take one point and work with it and build upon it. When a person serves Hashem in this way, it means that he should not work on other areas at the same time. Although "for every rule, there is an exception to the rule", generally, we must stick to the rules. When we work on more than one point at the same time, this is detrimental to our growth.

That is when a person uses the method of *binyan* to serve Hashem. But there is another way, *hisorerus*, which is that a person can inspire himself to improve on other areas he needs to work on. However, the nature of *hisorerus* is that it is a special burst of inspiration which comes from Hashem, and it changes from day to day. This creates a contradiction in one's *Avodas Hashem*,

because *binyan* makes a person focused on one point alone, while *hisorerus* is about a different matter each day.

This is apt to make a person confuse *hisorerus* with *binyan* – a person will try to take his *hisorerus* and build upon it, which will make him lose the whole goal. What, then, should we do with *hisorerus*?

Let's say a person hears of a tragedy: someone lost her husband, or someone lost his parent. If this inspires him to work on himself, he should look at it as *hisorerus*, but not as a *binyan*. He should let himself get inspired by it, but he shouldn't attempt to build upon that inspiration. Instead, he should let the inspiration serve as an **awakening** for him to **continue** his *binyan*.

How To Gain From Inspiration

When a person confuses *hisorerus* with *binyan*, it's like a forbidden mixture. What is the solution then? How can we know if something is supposed to serve as a mere inspirational awakening for us, or as something we need to build upon?

The answer is that there are two kinds of *hisorerus*.

There are people who have never entered *Avodas Hashem*. You can have a person who is totally self-absorbed in his various fantasies. If he wants to pull himself out of this, he needs to get rid of the spiritual dirt covering him. With this type of inspiration, he should use whatever works to get himself out of his spiritual rut.

But there is another kind of *hisorerus*, and that is for a person who already has a plan in *Avodas Hashem*, and it is just that he has a bit spiritually asleep; such a person needs to awaken his plan from time to time, when he needs it.

This is a whole different kind of *hisorerus*. The first kind of person needs to be awakened from the rut he is in, which is that he's wasting his time and full of all sorts of impediments from *Avodas Hashem*. He needs to be given a general guidance in *Avodas Hashem*. The second kind of person we discussed, though, already has a way of *Avodas Hashem*, but it is just that from time to time, he loses his energy, and he forgets what he has to do. He needs to be inspired to return to his plan.

We hope that those who are reading this are like the second kind of person, because the first kind of person, who is caught up and wasting time, does not know how to use *hisorerus*. He doesn't have guidance in *Avodas Hashem* to begin with, and even when gets inspired to change, he doesn't have a way to go on. So hopefully, we are all past this stage.

We will thus focus on the second kind of *hisorerus*, which is to help a person get back to what he knows is true, and he just needs to be re-energized.

Every person, if he really wants to serve Hashem, has to know what to work on first, what comes in the middle, and what is in the goal. One must know which point he is currently at, and to what he is aspiring for.

We can compare this to a person climbing a ladder. First, a person has to know which rung to begin climbing the ladder with. Then he sees which rung he is on. Finally, he sets his eyes on the top of the ladder and begins to climb it. If one of these three steps is missing, a person doesn't know where to begin and to where he is going, and he will fall from the ladder.

If a person doesn't know where he is holding, he is very confused in how to serve Hashem. He doesn't know what to work on, and what happens? He will work on matters that are above his level to work on, and his actions will not be in line with his heart. And if a person loses sight of his goal, he might know what he has accomplished so far, but he lacks purpose to his life.

Thus, in order to gain from listening to words of inspiration, a person first has to give himself orderliness in his *Avodas* Hashem. When a person has that orderliness, then even when he becomes sleep-like in his *Avodas* Hashem, he will know how to awaken himself and see where he is at, and then be able to continue happily.

1.3 | *The Importance of Reflection*

There Must Be A Basis

As we approach *Avodas Hashem*, we first have to know where to begin. What is the basis that all these matters stand upon? Only after knowing this can we begin to build ourselves, because if we don't have the basis, all our work has nothing to stand upon.

We cannot skip over this basis. If someone lacks the patience to build the very basis we are about to say, he won't be able to build himself up either, and he definitely will not gain from anything here.

The Ramchal's Amazing Advice

What is the basis that all of our *Avodas Hashem* stands upon?

We will quote the words of the Ramchal (*sefer Derech Eitz Chaim*) and then explain them: "The general rule is that if a person doesn't think about this, it will be very difficult to reach perfection, but if one thinks about it, he is very close to perfection."

In other words, there is a basic point here, and if someone doesn't use it, it will be very difficult for him to reach perfection. This is very clear.

It is hard to understand how one can run away from this advice of the Ramchal. The Ramchal himself is testifying that one should think about this advice and use it. This can bring a person "very" close to perfection, as the Ramchal puts it so exactly. Without making use of this advice he is about to say, one is very far from Hashem.

Anyone who is involved with the inner work of *Avodas Hashem* knows that it is impossible to see any growth without this advice from the Ramchal. Anyone who searches for the truth knows how important it is. If someone doesn't appreciate it, then he needs to learn how to want this truth.

What is that advice? The Ramchal says: "A person goes by so many years of his life thinking about all kinds of things. Why can't he think at least an hour a day about who he is and why he came onto this world, and what Hashem wants from him? And what will be with his end? This is the greatest remedy against the yetzer hora. It is easy to do, and its results are tremendous. A person, every day, should empty out all his thoughts for an hour a day."

The Ramchal stresses that this is easy to do, as opposed to the mistaken notion that it's too hard.

During this time, a person should empty out his thoughts – he shouldn't think of his family, and he shouldn't talk on the phone. He should be totally alone. Of course, a person is never truly alone, because Hashem is always here.

What should a person do during this time? The Ramchal continues: “He should think about this that I have said. He should ask himself in his heart, “What did the forefathers do that they became so desired by Hashem? What did Moshe Rabbeinu and Dovid HaMelech do, and all the great leaders who came before me?”

The Ramchal then quotes the Zohar, who says that it is indeed hard to find someone who sets aside an hour each day to reflect. The Ramchal is thus teaching us that if we want to have the fundamental to succeed, we must be prepared to do this every day.

Deciding To Practice This

Before we explain more in detail how to go about this, we must know that if we seek truth, we must decide, *bli neder* (without accepting a vow) that we will practice it. If not, we are fooling ourselves.

A person might learn advice from this *sefer* and that *sefer*, but he will never get anywhere if he never decides to practice any of it. There are all kinds of good advice in the *sefarim*, and they are all true and holy, but they do not help a person if the person doesn't decide that he will practice them.

Thus, each person should make a *cheshbon hanefesh* (self-accounting) with Hashem and decide that he wants to serve Hashem, or else everything here is just a waste of words.

If a person truly has a will to change, he shouldn't push it off for three or four months and then do it – he should do it now, *bli neder*! A person needs to decide that *bli neder*, he will set aside an hour each day for reflection.

The truth is that we are all very busy. That is the way it is with people. But this is our test: if we will set aside time every day, or not. This is the basis to connect to Hashem! Even a thousand inspiring lectures or all the *sefarim* in the world won't help you grow unless you have this time you set aside every day to reflect.

Even after you decide you will do this, know that all beginnings are hard. It will be hard at first. If you fail, don't fall apart; instead seek other advice that will help you keep to this reflection time. If you lose one day, don't give up, and try again tomorrow.

Know that in order to live an internal kind of life, your soul depends on this hour of reflection every day. Ask advice from others about how you can keep to it, but one thing is clear: realize how important it is.

What To Do During This Time

Now we will explain what to do during this time. Each person has his own way of doing things, and we cannot give a formula for everyone. But we can give general rules, and each person can find his unique way.

The Ramchal has already said what to do: that a person should think, “What did the forefathers do?” Before this, he also wrote, “He should think what his purpose is, and for what he was created for.” We all know what a person was created for: to bask in the pleasure of Hashem, as the Ramchal writes in the beginning of *Mesillas Yesharim*. If so, it should be very clear to a person that the one thing we seek in our life is: closeness to Hashem.

The problem is that our heart is full of various desires. “*For the heart of man is evil from his youth.*” The bad *middos* of jealousy, desire and seeking honor remove a person from the world – they remove a person from the true desires of a person, which is to be close to Hashem.

When a person has an hour each day to reflect in solitude, he can realize during this time that his purpose is to become close to Hashem. He can then begin to beseech Hashem that He help him want this. Although on a deep note, every Jew wants to be close to Hashem, this will isn’t so revealed by people.

A person daven to Hashem, saying: “*Ribono Shel Olam*, I know that the truth is that the purpose of this world is to become close to You. But I feel that I have other desires than this. Please help me and direct me on the right path.”

The more a person builds himself up, the more time he will find that he is able to spend with talking to Hashem. He will find that he has an hour, even two hours a day, to talk to Hashem. If someone is already practicing this, he doesn’t need to be guided more. He has already built up his ability to speak with Hashem.

The words here are meant for those people who aren’t yet used to this, and they are trying to get used to it. What a person should do is lock the doors, take his mind off everything, and begin to speak with Hashem, in the way we have said. He can say, “*Ribono shel Olam*, help me desire the truth. I know the truth, but I don’t feel it.” A person should continuously beg Hashem as much as he can for this.

After five or ten minutes pass like this, a person will probably lose the energy to continue. All beginnings are hard, so it is recommended that a person take a break for a few moments and say

to Hashem, “*Ribono shel Olam*, my true desire is to daven to You, but it is hard for me, so I am resting for now.”

Then he can add on, “To talk to You is too hard for me right now, so I will say *Tehillim* instead to awaken Your mercy on my behalf, that my prayers be accepted.” Or, he can give *tzedakah* during this time.

After a few minutes he can close his *Tehillim* and begin again to talk to Hashem for another five minutes. He can keep repeating this cycle until the hour finishes. Although it might end up that he only spoke to Hashem for fifteen minutes in the hour he put aside, still, he has accomplished in that he has set aside an hour each day to try to become closer to Hashem.

A person should keep talking to Hashem from the depths of his heart, and if he can’t do this, he should *daven* to Hashem that he should be able to express himself: “*Ribono Shel Olam*, I know this is all true, and I know that I must beg You for this, but even this is hard for me. Help me that I should know how to daven to you as I should.”

The main thing is never to give up. Even if a person doesn’t have energy to say *Tehillim* during this hour and he doesn’t feel like talking to Hashem, he should at least sit during this hour and reflect. After five minutes, he should say to Hashem a few words: “I want to talk to You, but I don’t have the energy. I will not budge from here, though, until I am given the strength I need. For this hour, I am sitting here.”

All beginnings are hard, and if someone isn’t used to this, it’s even harder, but this is the first step for anyone who seeks the truth. If the Ramchal is telling us that this is the fundamental point of life, then this hour of reflection is the key to success. We have to be very stubborn about it, at any price.

The Hour That is the Basis for the Rest of the Day

This hour of reflection is not just an hour of the day to itself. It is the basis of the entire day, and from it a person should draw his energy for the rest of the day!

Throughout the day, it is very hard to be connected to Hashem all the time (unless a person is on a very high level). It is thus proper to at least have one hour a day of closeness to Hashem, which will serve as the basis for the rest of the day. It is a time each day to simply speak with Hashem, a time of solitude and yearning for the truth. Besides for the *mitzvos* we do each day, our *davening* each day, and saying *Tehillim* each day, a person needs one hour which is devoted to one thing alone: closeness to Hashem, a time in which a person feels that the “true good” on this world is to be close to Hashem.

Without this, a person will never really become close to Hashem.

Imagine if someone comes to us and says, “Fellow Jews! I have a piece of advice for you that will get you straight into Gan Eden, to Olam Haba, to truly be close to Hashem.” Wouldn’t we all run to listen to this advice? The Ramchal is telling us this advice! I am not the first person to tell you this.

The problem is that we have a *yetzer hora* who prevents us from keeping to it. That is the only way to explain how people can see these words of the Ramchal and not keep to it.

These words are not a lecture, nor are they ideas. Without a doubt, anyone who tries to practice it will encounter pressure from others not to do it. Hashem should help each person reach the truth and practice these words in his actual life, and discover that the true good is closeness to Hashem – as it is written, “*And as for me, closeness to Hashem is what is good.*”

1.4 | *Making A Self-Accounting*

Always Remembering the Goal

The *Mesillas Yesharim* compares life to a confusing garden-maze which we must navigate, and how only one who has already been through the maze can help us get to the goal of the maze, which is its center.

What is in that center? What is the center that we strive for?

The answer is: *Ain Od Milvado* – The recognition that “there is nothing besides for Hashem”. There are many ways to get there, but what is it that we are searching for? The *Ribono shel olam* (Master of the World).

We will try to delineate the proper paths to get to that center of the maze which we strive for, but we must always remember the goal that we want to reach. If we forget the goal, we will also lose the proper path to get there. We must all be very clear in this and remember at all times that all we search for is always *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

We will ascend - and we will fall - as we proceed. Our goal is not to increase concentration in our davening, not to sharpen our brains, not *ruach hakodesh*, nor to reach high levels. These are all wonderful things, but they are merely *ways* how to get to the *Ribono shel Olam*. Whatever we comprehend is only a *way* to get to Hashem, and it is not a *goal* unto itself.

We need to repeat this at all times: **the goal is to find Hashem**. If one forgets this, there is no basis to any of our inner work here, and the path will be very shaky. If we remember constantly “*Shivisi Hashem L’negdi Tamid*” – “Hashem is always beside me” – then we will have a chance to grow and succeed.

May Hashem help us get to the center of the “garden-maze” and then integrate with it.

Making Time for Self-Accounting

In the previous chapter, we brought the amazing advice of the Ramchal on how to reach human perfection: that we set aside an hour every day for time to think into important matters. We will now explain how we can make this more practical.

There are many people who make a *cheshbon hanefesh* (self-accounting) every day, but they don’t get to the desired goal. It is a matter which needs guidance.

The *Mesillas Yesharim* explains that the *yetzer hora* is tricky and makes us too busy to reflect on important matters, and in doing so it is like Pharaoh, who increased the labor so that the Jews wouldn't have any time to think about important matters.

It is not only physical work which makes people forget about what's important, but even spiritual work can make a person forget about his priorities! It's possible that a person is so involved in spirituality that he forgets the main thing. You can have a person who is immersed in learning Torah, davening, and doing *chessed*, but it can all be superficial actions, and he is missing the inner point of it all.

Torah without Hashem in one's life, *davening* without Hashem, *chessed* without Hashem – it's all just like grabbing onto air. A person will still get rewarded in Gan Eden for these things, but they will never bring a person to a recognition of Hashem.

Often, "quantity" of deeds takes away from the "quality" of our deeds. Chazal state that "it is better to have at least a little concentration than to do much action with no concentration." This doesn't mean that one shouldn't be concerned about increasing the quantity of his deeds, but if we need quantity, how much more so do we need quality.

Thus, we need to set aside time every day to reflect, because otherwise, we will be bogged down by the busyness of life and we won't be able to reach our goal.

The question is how much time we each need to spend on this, and each person is different in how much time he will need for this. We can still give general rules, though, that apply to everyone.

Bring Your Life to a Halt

One of the practices in the Yeshiva of Kelm was "*Asiri Kodesh*" – every ten days after Yom Kippur, they would make a "mini Yom Kippur" and have a day set aside for *Avodas Hashem*, *cheshbon hanefesh*, and self-examination.

This shows us something very important about how to serve Hashem. We are used to the humdrum of life, and there is very little order going in the way we live our life. We only have one day of the year in which we really reflect – Yom Kippur. But let's think about our situation.

The *sefarim hakedoshim* prescribe fasts for the ten days in between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The *Sefer Chareidim* writes, however, in the name of the Arizal, that fasting is only for people who don't learn Torah, but if someone learns Torah, he doesn't have to fast.

What, then, will help atone our sins? Will our learning Torah atone for our sins? That's what it would seem, but that's not what the *sefer Chareidim* writes. He writes something else entirely:

that once a week, a person should set aside a day to do *teshuvah* (repentance) and that on that day, he should feel like it's Yom Kippur.

Once a **week** – not once a year – a person should make for himself a Yom Kippur. This advice is both easy and hard at the same time. From a superficial viewpoint, it seems easy to do, but in actuality, it takes hard work.

All of us have various responsibilities we need to take care of, and we all find that there is simply no time for this. A *Kolel avreich* has a *chavrusa* for three learning sessions a day, and he is tied to them. If someone has a job, he has to get to work on time, and he can't leave early. We all have responsibilities, so what are we to do? Yet, at the same time, we have to worry that all of this makes us forget our mission on this world.

The truth is that even a day of introspection for once every week isn't enough to help us reach our goal in life. If so, what did the *Sefer Chareidim* mean that once a week suffices? He did not mean to simply sit and think about what your deeds once a week. That is commendable too, but that is not the depth to his words. It is deeper than that.

What the *Sefer Chareidim* was really getting at was that the very humdrum of life damages our *Avodas Hashem*. Even an hour or two for *cheshbon hanefesh* is swallowed up by the rest of the week; it's not enough.

Time to reflect can only help a person if he does it for at least six, seven, eight, ten, or perhaps twelve hours a week straight. Only several hours straight of *cheshbon hanefesh* can bring the week to a halt. This is tried and tested, and for someone who lives this way, he transforms into a new person.

If someone cannot reflect throughout the hours of the day, then it will be more practical for him to set aside every Thursday night to reflect. He can start at 9 o'clock and end at *alos hashachar* (dawn).

What To Think About During This Time

And what should a person think about during this time for reflection?

It is not recommended for a person to learn *sefarim* that deal with the topic of *teshuvah*. This defeats the purpose, because instead of actually doing *teshuvah*, the person will be just "learning" about *teshuvah*.

What a person should do, then, is to set aside a few hours in which he can think and examine his deeds. He doesn't have to go through every last detail of what he has done this week so far, but

just to see how he is living his life in general. He should begin each week anew from the simplest point.

What is that simplest point? The fact that there is a Creator!

We all know this, but we must remember the statement of our Sages that “a *baal teshuvah* (returnee to Judaism) is like a baby born anew”. We need to renew ourselves and start from scratch. When a baby is born and he begins to grow up, he is first taught the *Aleph Beis*. The same goes for each person – we all have to begin again anew each week and start from the simple facts, such as: “There is a Creator, and we must listen to Him. What does He want from me? What is the goal, and what are its details? Am I heading towards the goal, or am I just caught up in the details?”

This is how you can reflect with yourself, slowly and patiently.

This appears at first to seem hard. A person naturally wonders, “Why should I think so much about simple facts? I already thought about this for the last three weeks already. I already know it.”

But this is the mistake. The Alter of Kelm stated that the heart of a person and the mind of a person are very far from each other, and they are more distant from each other than the heavens with the earth. We know a lot in our **minds**, but our **heart** is usually a *lev even*, a “heart of stone”. We need to soften out our heart into *lev basar*, a heart of flesh. How can we do that?

We don’t need hair-raising revelations or mind-blowing discoveries about life. We need simplicity! Rebbi Akiva changed because he noticed a very simple fact: a drop of water can break through a rock. There is a simple, small “drop of water” which we can all see: that “there is a *Ribono shel Olam*, and He wants me to draw close to Him.”

We aren’t speaking about intellectual knowledge. We are speaking about matters of our heart. Each week, you can add on more “drops” – simple points that can penetrate the heart.

How do we repeat to ourselves simple points? We can use a method of Reb Yisrael Salanter, who would stay up an entire night repeating just one statement of Chazal (Taanis 31a): “If one adds on (nights onto his days of learning Torah), he will gain more life, but if he doesn’t add on, he will be gathered to die before his time.”

Reb Yisrael Salanter was a brilliant genius; how much time did it take for him to understand this statement? It didn’t take a whole night. He probably came up with many novel interpretations of this statement of Chazal after one night, but what he was repeating was the simplicity of it, that if someone doesn’t learn Torah at night, he will die before his time.

This is the main point – to repeat simple facts. If this is missing, whatever we will build after this will collapse, because it will have no basis.

If a person checks examines well into his heart, he will discover that in his heart, he doesn't really believe in Hashem! It's a chilling revelation. People think they for sure believe that there is a Creator, but if you speak to many people and see what's going on in their heart, you can discover that they're in doubt about Hashem. Of course, Hashem is found in every person's heart – that is, one the outermost part of the heart. The big question is, how much does a person simply recognize Hashem in the depths of his heart?

The innermost point of one's heart is the point of simplicity. It is written, "*Pour out your heart, nochach (opposite) Hashem.*" When a person cries, this is not out of his intellectual knowledge, but from the simple facts one realizes. In order to dig down into ourselves and reach the innermost point of our heart, the point of simplicity, we need to approach it with simplicity. When a person thinks about something he knows intellectually but he doesn't review the simple points, it is just information to him, and he is missing the main point.

A person has to get used to this and be able to review simple points, and practice for even two or three hours going over simple facts. He should say them with contemplation and feeling as well, as much as he can muster. The words he should say are: "**There is a Creator!**"

Someone who never tries this will look at this as something foreign and weird. But if someone is internal, he knows that going over these three words can break the walls over his heart and reach great closeness to Hashem through it.

If someone can't do this for so long, he should at least say it for a few minutes and then take a break for five minutes, and then start again. This is the beginning step – that one should say these simple words: "There is a Creator."

After practicing this for some time, a person can then begin to do *Teshuvah* and think into his deeds. How can a person examine his deeds? There are two parts to this. One step is to see if one is acting according to *Halacha*. The other step is to for one to see how much thought he is putting into what he does; he should ask himself: "Do I think before I do something that I am doing this to get close to Hashem, or am I just acting by rote?"

In order to work on these points, a person will need to take upon himself certain reminders that will help him think more before he does something, that he is doing it to become closer to Hashem.

"For We Are Your Servants"

After a person has worked on these points every week, and he has bettered his actions as a result from this self-introspection, he can now proceed to the next step, which is to remind himself of the basic point: that one has to serve the Creator. "*For we are Your servants.*"

How can we work on this point? It's very simple. When you repeat the words "There is a Creator", like we mentioned before many times, you can repeat with them the words, "*Ani avdecha*" - "I am Your servant."

A person can talk to Hashem for two or three hours in this way, and just say these three words: "*Ani avdecha!*"

These words are supposed to penetrate your heart. You don't have to analyze intellectually what it means to be a "servant" of Hashem; this is not an intellectual discussion. That will be the next step – to think into what it means. But now is the very first step, which is to review the simple facts. Repeat to yourself, "*Ribono shel Olam*, I am Your servant."

Repeat it again and again to yourself until you realize it as a simple fact, that you are Hashem's servant, and that serve the Creator. These two simple facts need to be repeated again and again, week after week, for two or three hours at a time.

This is the first stage: once a week, make a *cheshbon hanefesh*.

Teshuvah

It should be very clear: without doing this once a week (for at least seven hours), it will be very hard to get to our goal, which is closeness to Hashem. It's not that it's impossible to be close to Hashem without this, but it's very difficult.

We have to always remember the words of Chazal (Berachos 17a), "The purpose of *chochmah*/wisdom is *teshuvah* (repentance) and *maasim tovim* (good deeds). We must know that without the goal of Torah, which is to come to *teshuvah*, then even our Torah will be sorely lacking. Don't consider this to be a waste of time, because this is the whole direction that the Torah is supposed to lead us to – Torah is supposed to lead us closer.

A person should take note of his schedule and find time once a week for this introspection – a time span of about seven to twelve hours of doing *teshuvah*.

There is not one of us who thinks that he can fast like how they fasted in earlier generations. Yet, the Arizal was the one who prescribed how many fasts one needs to atone for each sin, but he was the same person who wrote that if one who doesn't have the strength to fast, he should instead do *teshuvah* for an hour a day.

If we don't use either method, our soul will remain full of damage from our sins, and we will never be able to reach Hashem. As we do not have the physical strength to take the first option, which is fasting, we need to take the alternative option, which is to do *teshuvah* once a week.

Daily Reflection

Until now we have spoken about doing *teshuvah* once a week; now we will take this further and explain how we should do *teshuvah* every day, once a day.

This consists of two parts. Every person has to carry out the words of the *Mesillas Yescharim* which we mentioned before, that a person should set aside at least an hour a day for *hisbodedus* (meditation) and *hisbonenus* (reflection) on his deeds. This has to be a full hour of the day in which you do nothing except *teshuvah* and *cheshbon hanefesh*.

If there is a day that goes by without this hour of introspection, it is very doubtful if that day was spent properly. One must be very careful to keep this hour every day. Set aside a time every day in which you free yourself from all of your busyness and designate it as time with the *Ribono shel Olam*. During this time, examine your deeds and think about why you came onto this world.

Besides for remembering one's deeds and repenting for any wrongdoings, one also has to remember simple points, as we mentioned. He can say to himself, "Who gave me this day? The *Ribono shel Olam*. For what reason did He give me this day? So that I can serve Him. Have I done that or not?"

The answer to this is either yes or no. Each person must inspect himself truthfully if his day was spent on doing the will of Hashem or not. After a person knows the answer, he should awaken from within himself a simple desire to have a better spent day tomorrow.

Every day, a person should talk to Hashem anew and say to Him: "I had a failure today in my service to You (really, every day has failures...). *Ribono shel Olam*, tomorrow I want to be better and serve You better than I did today. I am begging you for this; the *yetzer hora* gets stronger every day, and if not for You helping me, it is impossible to overcome it. I know that if You don't help me, I will fail the entire day. I am begging You that You help me serve You, and that You awaken in me a true desire to serve You. Guide me on the right path how to serve You, and give me the tools I will need."

This is how a person should speak with Hashem; it should be like how a friend talks to another friend. At first this is hard, but slowly as a person gets used to it, he will feel as if he's actually talking to Hashem naturally, and he will realize that Hashem listens to our prayers.

Don't be flustered by any failures from the past. That is normal; "*A righteous person falls seven times and then gets up.*" One doesn't just fall seven times – he keeps falling another seven times, and another seven times, and Hashem helps him up after each time! But if a person is in a general ongoing situation of failure, he has to strengthen himself anew each day. He should go to sleep with a strong feeling in his heart that tomorrow, he will get up with one goal: to serve the Creator. If a day goes by that a person goes to sleep without this aspiration, from where will he draw the strength for tomorrow?

If a person doesn't simply speak with Hashem and he doesn't do *teshuvah* every day (we are not referring to *teshuvah* for one's sins, but *teshuvah* to be on the general, proper path – a simple desire to serve Hashem and be close to Him), he will not receive any Heavenly assistance for the next day.

The way a person goes to sleep is the way he gets up. If a person goes to sleep with a decision to get up in the morning and serve Hashem, Hashem will help him do so.

In any case, a person should have an hour every day in which he brings the day to a halt and he reflects into his deeds, and he awakens himself to have an inner desire to serve Hashem, by repeating simple facts.

Reflecting Throughout The Day

The next step of our *Avodah* is to stop and reflect throughout the day.

If a person only reflects at nighttime, then the twelve hours of daytime are spent without any thought. What can he do about this? He has to catch himself throughout the course of the day. It is hard to set rules for how to go about this, but once every hour or two, a person should take five minutes and remember simple facts: "There is a Creator, He created me and sustains me every second. Every second He gives me life to serve Him and fulfill His will."

In five minutes, it is impossible to make a *cheshbon hanefesh* and examine one's deeds. But what a person can do is simply remember that he has to serve the *Ribono shel Olam*, that He lives for Him and needs to serve Him.

If a whole day goes by and a person never thinks about any of this, he will forget even simple facts.

Let us not think that this is a new path to take in *Avodas Hashem*. The Vilna Gaon did the same thing – he would learn a few hours, then stop to learn Mussar, and then he would return to his learning. This practice is also written in the *sefer Nefesh HaChaim*, a close student of the Vilna Gaon: that a person should stop every so often during his learning and reflect about fear of Heaven.

Our thoughts are wandering about throughout the day anyway. Why not take our thoughts and use them to think about what's important in our life? For just five minutes every hour or so, review simple facts.

To summarize, we have given three fundamental practices: to make a *cheshbon hanefesh* once a week for several hours, to make an hour of *cheshbon hanefesh* each day, and to reflect every day for five minutes every hour or so into simple truths.

If a person continues to do this, Hashem will assist him to reach the truth, and he will attain closeness to Hashem, Who is the Source of all truths. But a person has to persist with these matters and be stubborn about it, and he shouldn't get flustered by any failures. One should daven to Hashem and cry for assistance to implement all this, to understand these matters properly and to find the proper path that is for him as an individual.

1.5 | *Calmly Detaching From This World*

Before Reflection, First We Must Be Very Happy and Calm Inside

We have explained that each person must set aside at least once a week time for introspection. During this time, one should think of the vanity of this world, and how being tied to this world takes away our mind from thinking about what's important. In this chapter, we will explain at length about how a person can disconnect from this strong attachment to this physical world.

When a person is sitting and reflecting about the Creator, even if he has put a halt to the noise of his daily actions, it is still hard to calm down from everything. When a person lacks inner calm, he won't be able to properly reflect into matters, and he won't get to the desired goal.

So what we have to know, firstly, is how we can get to that inner calm in order to be able to think properly.

The first thing we can suggest for this is that a person shouldn't attempt to jump straight into heavy thinking about *teshuvah* and improving his *Avodas Hashem*. Rather, for the first fifteen minutes of this time, he should sit calmly. This is not just to be idle; it is to be calm as a preparation for doing *teshuvah* and improving one's *Avodas Hashem*. One should think to himself very calmly that he is preparing himself to do *teshuvah*.

After 15 minutes, when he is already somewhat calmed, he can begin to think about what he has to think about, in the way we have explained in the previous chapters.

There is another suggestion that is advisable here, and it is double the gain. This is that one should think: Maybe today is my last day on earth!

Don't be depressed about this. It should instead make you feel happy inside.

How can such a thought make you happy? How can you not become morbid when you think about such a thing?

The solution to this both involves both a superficial approach and an internal approach. We can give one piece of advice that can help a person reach inner calm - as well as doing *teshuvah* as a way to awaken your happiness - in a way that doesn't cause any sadness.

Step One: Physical Calmness

The advice is that after 15 minutes of sitting quietly, it would be good to listen to a stirring song (that stems from a pure source), not a sad song or a loud song, but a *niggun* (tune) that expresses yearnings for something, that can awaken your soul. There is much gain from this, and anyone who tries this can attest to how helpful it is.

What is the gain from this? Firstly, the *niggun* can make you calm, and this is already a tool that can help you free yourself of previous thoughts that have piled up in your head from the whole day and week. In addition to this gain, your reflection will be done more out of joy. Although it's superficial joy at this point and not yet inner joy, still, it's a lot better than nothing. It can help you reflect properly and then cause you to feel inner joy throughout the rest of the day.

That is the superficial part of the job – listening to a stirring melody, which helps you calm down physically.

Step Two: Calmly Letting Go of This World

What is the inner part of this that brings you to joy?

The *Chovos HaLevovos* writes that “a righteous person awaits his day of death”. How can a person look forward to his death?! Do people suffer so much on this world that they'd rather die?! The answer to this, though, is very simple.

A person can actually look forward to his the day of death – out of a desire to have a true life. The *avodah* of desiring one's day of death is really about desiring life, the right kind of life, on this world. Let us explain why.

To what are we aspiring for on this world? If a person just wants a lot of money, or to have great kids (which can also be a physical desire), he's very connected to this world, and he has no desire whatsoever to want to take leave of this world. When his time comes to leave the world, he will be very, very sad about this.

But if a person has already in his lifetime developed a deep desire to connect to the Creator, and to only seek the truth – both in the internal world of the soul, as well on the physical earth he lives on – such a person naturally has yearnings for a more angelic world, a world of the soul. He naturally longs to leave this “world of falsity” and to connect to a better world of truth. A person knows that even if he has overcome the lies of this world, he is still affected by the foul smells of this world's falsehood, and he wants to run away from even this, and thus he longs for a world of truth.

This change of mindset can only come to a person on condition that he searches for truth on this world in his lifetime. It can't come suddenly to a person when it is time to leave the world; the attitude has to be developed before, already in one's lifetime.

The Real Reason Why People Fear Death

Let us be more specific about what we mean here.

A person is sitting and reflecting and then he realizes that one day, he might suddenly die, *chas v'shalom*, and he will have to leave this world. He feels sad from this. What does he do to relieve this feeling?

He might go to drink some wine to calm himself down; Chazal indeed say the wine can take away the fear of death. Although this is true, it is just acting superficially; a person has to develop his internal world. What is the inner approach?

What a person should really do is sit calmly and ask himself: "Why am I afraid to die? If Eliyahu HaNavi would come to me and offer me a choice to either go to the World of Truth or stay here, what would I choose? (What would I really answer, and why am I answering that...?)

(There were great *tzaddikim* who didn't want to die, though. An example is the Vilna Gaon, who said that he doesn't want to die - but not for any of the reasons that we have. His reason was because he wanted to continue serving Hashem on this world, as opposed to being dead, when a person can't do any *mitzvos*. He had no personal desires – he didn't want to die because that would mean being free of *mitzvos*, which was his true fear.)

Hashem made people born with a natural fear of death. The root of this fear actually is rooted in a holy feeling from our soul, which fears the true death – a life that is disconnected from the Creator. Now *that* is death.

It is written, "*And you shall cleave to Hashem your G-d, and you shall all be alive today*". Having *d'veykus* with Hashem means that we are truly alive, and without *d'veykus*, we are basically living a deathlike kind of existence. Our soul is truly scared of this total kind of death, because to be disconnected from Hashem is like being cut off from its source, and there is no greater death than this.

The soul comes down onto this world and gets clothed by the body, and the soul's feelings of a person as well are clothed by the body, so a person often feels his soul's messages as bodily feelings. For this reason, a person fears death. But the usual fear of death that people identify with is the body's fear of death, which is just a reflection of the true kind of fear of death. Really, the death of the body would begin the soul's life, but the more emphasis a person places on his body's life and not his soul's life, the more death his soul experiences.

Thus, the fear of death is really a message from the soul, which fears spiritual death. So when a person fears death, he should ask himself where the fear is coming from. There are many reasons why a person fears death, but most of the time, they stem from being so tied to this world, because people are scared to leave this world's vanities.

Some people are very connected to their families, and they fear what it would be like to be separated forever from their family. Others are very tied to their money and fear death because that would mean no more money. Everyone has their own natural reason to fear death.

Therefore, every person should ask himself: "To what am I really connected to on this world?"

This is the true test. Even if we aren't aware consciously of what the reason is, we have to figure out what's going in our sub-conscious, the very depths of our soul. This will help that when our time eventually comes to leave this world, we will be able to pull away easily from our connection to this physical world.

This World Has Nothing To Offer

A person should imagine to himself what it would really be like to leave this world, and why he is so afraid of leaving it.

When a person is clear about all the reasons he fears death, he should then review the words of the *Mesillas Yescharim*: "Besides for this (connection to Hashem), what people think is "good" is nothing but futility." He should repeat this tens of times, even a hundred or even a thousand times – until he acquires the attitude.

It is written, "*It is not good for man to be alone, I shall make for him a helpmate opposite him.*" Simply speaking, a "*helpmate opposite him*" is "good", and a person is tied to this situation on this world. But the true meaning of this is that when a person is too connected to his "helpmate" – a reference to the body, which his soul inhabits – as well as worldly matters – it is too hard for him to leave this world, or his family, or anything else that he has on this world.

But when a person realizes that his stay on this world is so that he can become connected to spirituality, to the soul – he will naturally want to leave this world when the time comes, because he'd rather be a soul that isn't tied down to a body, than to be a soul that is bound to a body.

When a person is sad when he thinks about death – sometimes this is consciously, but usually it is deep in one's subconscious – it is really because he is too connected to this world, and he doesn't want to give it up. A person's *avodah*, then, is to truly reflect about this, in a calm manner; he should understand that true joy can never come from being connected to this world.

The words of the Vilna Gaon are famous: “This world is like salty water – the more a person partakes of it, the thirstier he becomes.” We can all know this intellectually, but how much do we succeed in remembering this? How much do we live with this idea? If we really believe in the words of our Chazal, we wouldn’t be interested at all in this world’s “salty water.” Worldly pleasures just make you thirstier for even more. So if a person decides that he is ready to give up this world one day, it shouldn’t be done with a feeling of sadness and regret. It’s the best realization!

When you think about the “true” good in comparison to whatever “good” this world has to offer, you will realize that you’re not giving up anything at all by deciding to disconnect from this world’s pleasures.

When one reflects into this, he should do so slowly and calmly, and happily. To accomplish this, one can use parables that help him come to this understanding. We can give a few examples that can be of aid, and each person can add on his own.

Recently, a wedding hall collapsed. Imagine if the owner of the wedding hall would come to us two weeks before it collapsed, and he would offer it to see it to us for 20 shekel. We would yell at him, “You’re crazy! 20 shekel for a wedding hall?!” He would answer, “Let me explain you something. I know that in two weeks from now, this hall will fall to the ground.”

Would anyone even agree to give him 20 shekel in such a situation? No one in their right mind would give him even 20 shekel for the building, because we have been informed that it’s going to collapse and be worth nothing. But if none of us think it’s going to collapse, we would all run to give him 20 shekel for the building.

Now, if you think about it, that would also be a huge mistake. Even if the owner himself gives you \$20,000 to take the building, you still shouldn’t take it! Why not? The answer is because the amount of stress and worry that this building will cost you is much more than \$20,000, and it is far from worth it.

Naturally, though, a person looks at what he will gain monetarily from accepting \$20,000 to take the building – and he doesn’t think about the consequences. He will have to spend so much time worrying about maintaining this building, and he will have to put all his energy into it, but he doesn’t think about this, and all he thinks about is the \$20,000 that he’s being offered to take the building.

That was the parable; now let us see the lesson we learn from this. When a person considers that he has only one goal in life – to only search for Hashem with all his heart – then everything in his life is always about how he can become close to Hashem through it, and he views every situation now differently. What seems simple to other people isn’t so simple to him, because since he seeks

Hashem, he realizes how certain undertakings can interfere with his *Avodas* Hashem and cause him to have pain.

A person has to become more clearly focused in everything and think: “Will this thing bring me closer to Hashem, or further away from Him?” One has to get used to purifying his mind more in this way, slowly but surely.

For example, money is something that a person can use to become closer to Hashem, or the opposite, *chas v’shalom*. Money doesn’t exist for itself – it can be used as a tool to serve Hashem.

The True Test: What Does Hashem Want?

We can give another example. A person is invited to a wedding, but he doesn’t feel like going. He says to himself, “I really don’t want to go, but I don’t want to insult my friend, so I’ll go.” This is really not the proper way to go about such a situation. Let us explain what the true approach should be.

First, a person should ask himself why he thinks that way. He should think of two options – why he should go to the wedding, and why he shouldn’t. “Why should I want to go the wedding? Because that will gladden my friend and his family. Why shouldn’t I go to the wedding? Because I should rather stay in the *beis midrash* and learn Torah. What will bring me closer to Hashem – going to the wedding, which is an act of *chessed*, or sitting and learning instead?”

Learning Torah is more important than *chessed*, but that alone isn’t enough to conclude that Hashem wants one to sit and learn rather than go to a wedding. This is because there is a rule that if a *mitzvah* cannot be accomplished by anyone other than you, you have to do it. Thus, the true barometer over here should be: “What will draw me closer to Hashem – staying to learn, or going to the wedding?”

Closeness to Hashem isn’t necessarily measured by how you feel. It’s easier to have elated feelings when you learn Torah than to drag yourself to a wedding and become emotional to gladden a bride and groom. How a person “feels” about something doesn’t decide if this act will bring him closer to Hashem or not.

Closeness to Hashem is determined by: What does Hashem want from me in this situation? Sometimes you have to do something because it will bring you closer to Hashem, even though it doesn’t create in you intense feelings of closeness to Hashem. Being close to Hashem is not about how you feel – it is about doing what He wills from us in a situation.

When Avraham Avinu became aware that he had guests, he left the Shechinah so that he could receive them, because “greeting guests is more important than receiving the Shechinah.” He gave up the Shechinah so that he could have guests! Being close to Hashem is not determined by how

much you feel the closeness. If Avraham Avinu would have gone by his feelings, he surely would have stayed with the *Shechinah*; after all, you feel much closer to Hashem in the presence of the *Shechinah*. But Avraham decided to do what was right, not what he felt. Being close to Hashem is to do what Hashem wants – not to do what makes you feel closer to Hashem.

We can give many examples of this concept, but the way of thinking is always the same: all day, the way we approach anything should always be weighed and measured if this thing will bring you closer to Hashem or not. When a person realizes that this physical world distances himself from Hashem, he will realize that he must separate from it, and he shouldn't feel sad or deprived in doing so. He should do it happily, because he has come to this truthful realization.

The *Chovos HaLevovos* writes that a *chassid* (pious individual) longs for the day of death, when his soul will leave his body. This desire, to return to Hashem, is actually not a level for only lofty people. Every Jew who strives to be close to Hashem should long to return to Hashem.

When a person realizes that the body holds back the soul from becoming close to Hashem, he will find that he actually awaits death, instead of remaining bound to the physical body.

A Life of Giving

Until now we explained the simple point that if one searches for the Creator, he should abandon his attachment to this world.

Now we will explain a deeper point: Why do people naturally want to cling to worldly interests, and how can we disconnect from it?

When we left Egypt, Hashem declared: *“For you are My servants.”* A Jew's purpose is truly feel that he is a servant to Hashem. We need to strive to be on a level in which we aren't in it for what we will get, but from a feeling of indebted kindness to Hashem for taking us out of Egypt. We need to redeem ourselves from our personal “Egypt” – from all the things that hold us back from serving Hashem. In order to do this, we have to feel indebted to Hashem for all His kindness, and not expect any reward for what we do.

If that would be the attitude, then everything will be different. Naturally, a person is only interested in what's in it for him, in what's good and enjoyable to do. But a person has to sit and reflect that this was not what he was created for. Hashem has created us and given us a purpose. We cannot get around the Creator. The Egyptians tried to be smarter than Hashem by making sure to drown all the boys so that the redeemer would not be born. In our own soul, there exists such an evil agenda as well – to try and outsmart Hashem and get away with just living for oneself.

Hashem is in charge. He makes the rules. He is telling each Jew that we do not live for ourselves. We live to serve the Creator. When a person realizes this, his whole life will change.

If a person is prepared to live a life of giving for Hashem, not a life of a taker, then it doesn't matter to him where he is placed. No matter the situation, a Jew is supposed to live a life of what he can do to become more giving towards Hashem, and this will help a person not depend on the physical world.

When a person only lives for the taking, he is very attached to this world. He might get himself to develop a love for Gan Eden, but this isn't true love for the Creator. He loves himself. Instead, a person has to live the truth, that there is a Creator and that we are His creations. Hashem is telling us one thing: *"You are My servants."* We cannot run away from Hashem, nor can we outsmart Him.

This is a deep matter, and it needs to be explained more, but we have opened it up. To summarize, there are two ways how we can disconnect from this physical world and not be dependent on it:

- 1) By realizing that this world is like "salty water." Being bound to this physical world doesn't allow us to be close to Hashem. If so, our decision to disconnect from this world is a happy one, and it should not cause us to feel deprived. After all, we want Olam HaBa, not this physical world.
- 2) We are servants of Hashem, and we live for Hashem. It doesn't make a difference where we are, because we must always serve Hashem. So why should it bother us if we separate from this world and enter the world of spirituality? (This method is a deeper method than the first one).

When these words are internalized in the heart, our soul will be calmed, and we will thus be able to have times of quiet to make a self-accounting. May Hashem help all of us to search for Hashem with our heart, and from this we should merit to find Him in our heart.

1.6 | Constantly With Hashem

The Secret to Success: Be Constant

Every Jew speaks to Hashem at least three times a day, as Chazal enacted. However, the problem is that usually there is no connection with Hashem **between** the *Tefillos* of the day. There is a lot of time in between *Shacharis* and *Mincha*, and this breaks up the connection.

This is similar to a person who keeps interrupting his learning – “his Torah is like torn pieces to him.”

The Chazon Ish teaches us that the secret to success, when it comes to any matter of holiness, is to be constant. If we want to build something, it has to be the like the “constant fire” on the Altar.

Of course, even without being constant, one always receives reward from Hashem. Hashem does not take away any reward from His creations (Bava Kamma 38b). But if we keep interrupting our inner work, we never get anything built, even if we keep trying to work hard. There has to be a consistency in our *Avodas Hashem*, or else we will not succeed.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz zt”l would compare this to heating up a pot of water. If we want to heat up water to cook with, we have to let it heat up for a few minutes and not interrupt it. If we keep turning it off every two or three minutes to use some of it, it will never get heated.

When a person talks to Hashem three times a day, there are two problems he faces. First of all, the amount of time that elapsed since his last *Tefillah* was a long time ago, as we said. That is one issue that deters his *Tefillah*. Another problem, which is even more troubling, is that the very quality of the *Tefillah* isn’t the same, now that such a long time has passed since the last time he *davened*. Any person, no matter what he does, encounters this problem. If a person learns in *Kolel* all day, or if he works all day to make a living – no matter what he does in his life, it is unrealistic to walk into *shul* when it comes time to *daven* and to suddenly start talking to Hashem, without some minimal preparation.

Preparing for *tefillah* is a *halachah* brought in *Shulchan Aruch* and the Rambam. Yet, even if a person fulfills his obligatory preparations, which is about 5-10 minutes – it’s still not enough to make him feel that he’s talking with Hashem. In order for a person to feel that he is really talking to Hashem when he *davens*, he has to connect his entire day to Hashem.

How can we do this?

Reflect About the Emptiness of this World

As we explained before, the first point is to simply give up worldly interests. If this world still interests a person, he is connected to it, and it makes him forget about his Godliness. The materialism of this world, as long as a person is bound to it, doesn't let a person get inspired. This causes a disconnection in between *Shacharis* with *Mincha*, and when this happens, a person only connects with Hashem when he *davens*. Throughout the day, he is disconnected from Hashem.

To feel connected with Hashem throughout the entire day, we first need to pull ourselves out of being tied to this world and its interests.

We do not mean that one cannot involve himself with worldly matters. We are not angels. But we should realize that we need to be involved physically with this world, and not to be connected to it with our hearts. Our heart has to remain in the right place. Although we need "Torah and *derech eretz*", our heart needs to be in a place of Torah, while only our hands should be used to carry out whatever we have to on this physical world, which is called "*derech eretz*." When the heart is connected to this physical world, this is where the downfall of a person starts.

This world fools a person and makes one forget about the simple truth. If we don't think throughout the day about it, we forget it. We must never forget that worldly pleasures are like really nothing when it comes to the grand end of things, and that after we die, we do not remain with them. "*For in his death he does not take everything, his honor will not go down with him.*" (Tehillim 49: 18).

The problem is that people know this in their mind, but their heart doesn't feel it. If a person wants to feel the truth in his heart, he must live the truth and come to recognize the emptiness of this world, and to come to the simple understanding that in the end, we all leave this world, and everyone has his time to die. The action of life makes us forget this simple fact, and this makes people think that they are here forever.

People know that we will all die one day, yet astonishingly, this knowledge doesn't affect their life, and they indulge in worldly pleasures. How can it be that people should spend so much effort on enjoying this world, when everyone knows good and well that we won't take any of it with us when we die? Of course, we must eat, drink and sleep as much as we need. But we must figure out how much we really need in order to stay healthy, to be able to serve Hashem.

Think What You Are About to Do

Before a person does anything, he should think what he is about to do. This brings life to a halt and enables one to come into something with a settled mind and to be at peace, instead of being rushed.

For example, a person sits down to eat. He should think that he is not eating out of being rushed, but that he wants to eat slowly and patiently. He should ask himself, before he eats, “Why I am eating? Does hunger happen by itself? (Some will say, yes, it is human nature to get hungry. But who created this nature in us? Does nature create itself? Of course not.) It must be that I am hungry because **Hashem** made me hungry.”

Hashem is always renewing the world; “*He who renews in His goodness, every day, the act of creation.*” You were hungry yesterday because Hashem renewed your hunger, and you are hungry today because Hashem renewed your hunger. When a person just lives life hastily – even in matters of *Avodas Hashem*, like if he eats in a rush so that he can get back to his learning or to go do a *mitzvah* – by acting in this way, he loses himself in the process!

When a person just eats without thinking beforehand, or if he *davens* or learns without any thought beforehand what he is doing – he loses a vital part of life. Thinking and preparing before doing something is a main part of what you do, as the *Mesillas Yesharim* writes.

If a person goes about everything with thought beforehand, like if he thinks before he eats in the manner we have described, then even though he’s enjoying his food, his mind is in the right place. His mind will not be in his food. Even the reasons for why he eats will become more *lishmah*; he definitely will not just be eating out of desire for food.

That is one point, which is the concept of *hisbonenus* (reflection) – thinking into what we do, before we do something.

Daven Before You Daven

There is another fundamental point which we must know, and it is very important. Through it, a person can be connected to Hashem throughout the course of the entire day, and then his three daily prayers will all become connected with each other: before a person does something, besides for thinking into it, he should also talk to Hashem and ask Him for help that he be successful.

For example, all of us can relate to having a hard time with *kavanah* (concentration) in *davening*. Only a few rare individuals have total *kavanah* when they *daven*. If someone really wants to *daven* to Hashem, he should first think: “From where do I have the energy to *daven* with *kavanah*?”

Maybe a person will counter to this, “If I get strange thoughts in my head as I daven, I’ll just ignore them.” But this is impossible, and it’s even heresy, because then a person thinks that it’s all up to himself, not Hashem. A person only has energy to do anything because of Hashem. The strength you had a minute ago isn’t here anymore, and your current strength can only come from Hashem, because Hashem is always renewing creation.

How much more so does this apply to *davening*, where it is hard to have *kavanah* – that a person cannot rely on himself for the energy to retain it, and he needs Hashem to help him concentrate.

Therefore, when a person is about to *daven*, he must be aware that it is only because of Hashem that he is able to have *kavanah*.

How can we be guaranteed, though, that we will for sure have *kavanah* just because we are aware of this? A person therefore has to think also, “*Ribono shel olam*, I know that I do not have the strength on my own even to move my lips. It is You who opens my lips – “*Hashem, open my lips.*” *Ribono shel Olam*, I want to daven to You, but please, help me, and give me the strength to talk to You without any distracting thoughts.”

In other words, the idea is that a person has to get used to talking to Hashem about every detail in his life, and attach Hashem to all the points in his life. By realizing that we cannot do anything on our own and we need Hashem for literally everything, one will feel how much he needs Hashem to help him get through to the next stage; and he can say, “Father ! You are my Father, You love me – and I am Your beloved son. I want to *daven* to You and speak with You. Help me actualize my will.”

Daven About Your Learning

This does not only apply to *davening* before you *daven*. It applies to all other areas in your life as well.

A person is sitting down to learn. Does he think he can understand the Gemara on his own? There is no person who doesn't encounter difficulty in his learning. There are questions and things we don't understand. Even more so, just because someone is smart doesn't mean he will know the Gemara he is learning today, because since Hashem is always renewing creation, being smart a minute ago doesn't automatically make you smart a minute later! There are also many people who open a Gemara and cannot understand even one word.

If so, why do people convince themselves that they can understand Gemara on their own, without the help of Hashem? It must be that people are used to the fact that they understand it. If yesterday someone understood the Gemara, he thinks that today also he will understand it.

But if a person thinks this way, he doesn't believe that Hashem is always renewing creation! Every day in *Shemoneh Esrei*, in the blessing of *Attah Chonen*, we *daven* for understanding. In fact, not only are we *davening* that we understand more things, but we are even *davening* that we should continue to understand even simple facts.

There were even very great *tzaddikim* became sick and couldn't learn Torah anymore, even on a simple level. The Baal Shem Tov, when he came to Eretz Yisrael, suffered a mental stroke and

couldn't learn anymore, and all he could do was *daven* like the simplest Jew. He comforted himself during this time that he realized how Hashem renews creation, and that the way you are a minute ago doesn't mean you will stay that way; he knew that just as he had fallen from his level, so can he return again to his level, if Hashem wills it so.

If a person lives with this simple feeling, he feels every second how much he needs Hashem. When a person sits down to learn, there is no guarantee that he will understand. He should stop and think, and *daven* to Hashem: "*Ribono shel olam*, I am a Jew, Your beloved son. You commanded me to learn Torah, and I want to do Your will. I ask of You to please merit me that I understand Your words of Torah which I will learn today." This is the simple approach that should accompany a person as he begins to learn.

That is how one should begin to learn, but then after a few minutes pass, a person also runs into difficulties. He thinks into it and he tries to understand it, but for some reason he can't. Now is the time to pull himself together and talk to Hashem about it (either mentally or verbally): "*Ribono shel olam*, the Torah is Your Torah, and I want to understand it so I can give You satisfaction. Please, merit me that I understand the words of Your Torah."

One has to simply feel that it was Hashem who made him not understand the Gemara, and that the answer to his question will come to him if he is aware that only Hashem allows him to understand it. This should not just be something one knows about in his head – it should be a simple feeling that accompanies you.

Davening For Every Last Detail In Your Life

Not only that, but a person should *daven* for every last detail in his life!

Before a person sits down to eat, he should say to Hashem, "*Ribono shel olam*, I want to eat so I will have energy to serve You (this is already stated in *Shulchan Aruch*). I am asking of You: if this food is improper for me to eat, I do not want to eat of it, and if it is befitting to eat, then please let this food give me energy to serve You."

There are many instances in which people eat. yet the food doesn't supply them with energy, and it even harms them physically. The digestion process is amazing, but just because one digested his food properly yesterday doesn't mean that it will work today. So we must also *daven* to Hashem that the food we eat should keep us healthy and not harm us.

By getting used to *davening* in the examples we gave (before *davening*, before learning, in middle of learning, before eating), a person connects Hashem with everything in his life, and then he has a constant bond with Him throughout the day.

Another example: a person is getting ready to go to sleep. A person definitely says *Kerias Shema al hamittah*, but what is he thinking as he's getting into bed? That he's tired? That he doesn't have any energy left in him?

He has to stop and think for a moment, before he says *Shema*, and talk to Hashem: *Ribono shel olam*, You created man with a body and a soul. The body which You gave me needs to rest. I am thus going to sleep because it is Your will that I sleep to maintain my body; I am asking of You that I merit to sleep in the proper way, and that I get up tomorrow refreshed, with new energy to serve You."

We all know that it's possible for a person to sleep for eighteen hours straight and still feel tired when he gets up. When a person wakes up in the morning and he still feels tired, he thinks, "What's so terrible?" He just continues with his life and doesn't think about this.

This is not the proper attitude. If one isn't sleeping well at night and he isn't refreshed when he gets up in the morning, this is also from Hashem, and a person should accept this discomfort lovingly. However, in addition to this, before a person is about to go to sleep he should talk to Hashem: "*Ribono shel olam*, please let me have a refreshing sleep, not so that I should have enjoyment out of it, but so that I can properly serve You tomorrow."

Connecting All Of Our Life With Hashem

We have already given several examples, but the point is that we need to get used to attaching every part in our life with Hashem and to talk to Him about it.

Let's say a person is going to a wedding. He should *daven* to Hashem that he be protected from any dangers along the way.

Another example is when a person goes to a Rav to ask a *shaaloh* (query). One should know that it's not so simple to always receive a proper answer! A Rav needs *siyata d'shmaya* (heavenly assistance) to give over the right words to those who come to him. Therefore, before going to the Rav, one should *daven*, "*Ribono shel olam*, I want to know what Your will is. You commanded me to make for myself a Rov to ask my questions to, and now I am going to the Rov to hear what You want from me. I am asking of You that You give me over the truth."

One of the Sages, Rav Nechunia ben Hakanah, would *daven* to Hashem before he learned that he shouldn't stumble in *Halachah*. A person should *daven* to Hashem before everything, not only in big matter, but even in small matters. When a person is *davening* about *shidduchim* (finding a spouse), he will go to the Kosel to *daven* for this, but it is not only for *shidduchim* that we must *daven* about! We need to *daven* every day no less than how we *daven* for a *shidduch*.

We need to take our life, with all its details, and connect it all with Hashem. We don't have to talk to Him on a very intellectual level, and we don't have to talk to Him by quoting Chazal. We don't have to offer Him complicating explanations of what we want to convey to Him. We instead need to talk to Him very simply, from our heart – in the way which a son talks to his father. When a son talks to his father, he doesn't have to give him a whole lecture about what he needs. He just talks to him out of a simple love for his father.

By getting used to talking to Hashem, a person acquires a great wealth. First of all, he gains in that all his three daily tefillos are connected, and there is no separation between them, because he has spent his whole day with Hashem. Dovid Hamelech said, *"I am prayer"*, in other words, my whole existence is to pray before I do something. This is the key to entering a world of holiness. It makes a person develop a very strong bond with Hashem.

The kind of bond with Hashem that we are trying to achieve here is not a relationship of fear, like to view Him as a "master" or a "king" over us. It is rather a relationship with our "Creator" – since we are His creations, we turn to our Creator. On a higher level, we can view Him as "Our Father", and this is when a person talks to Him on the simplest, basic level.

The three *tefillos* which we *daven* every day – *Shacharis*, *Mincha*, and *Maariv* – were instituted by Chazal, but we are used to them. When a person speaks from his heart to Hashem – simply – he reveals a very simple point of his soul. At first, it is very hard to do, but one must remember well that our whole life should include Hashem in it, whatever the situation. To disconnect from Hashem in any way is to disconnect from life itself.

May Hashem help all of us come to realize the simple truth of how "We have only one heart, toward our Father in heaven", and that we divorce any other matters from our heart. We should not have to beat ourselves up inside to do this. Rather, we should simply realize that this world is fleeting, and we will have nothing left of it except for Hashem. Hashem is the essence of life, for it is written, *"For with You is the source of life, in Your light there appears all light."*

1.7 | *Building An Inner Life of the Heart*

Recognizing in the Heart the “True Good”

The actions we do throughout the day are many: praying, learning Torah, doing *mitzvos*, and other things we have to take care of. What is the one point that connects them all?

Let us examine the words of the *Mesillas Yescharim*: “The main reason for a person’s existence on this world is to do the *mitzvos* and to withstand difficulties...however, it is proper that a person should only be directed toward Hashem, and that he should have no goal in mind in any action he does, small or big, other than closeness to Hashem, and to break the barriers that separate him from the Creator. Whatever a person can think to enable this closeness, he should run after it and cling to it, and not slacken. If anything he thinks holds back this closeness, he should run from it as if it is fire.”

Here the *Mesillas Yescharim* is telling us a great rule – a rule that has no exception – that we should have no other goal in whatever we do other than to become close to Hashem. This is the first thing we need to prepare before we do any action: realize that the purpose of any action is to become close to Hashem.

To illustrate what we mean, let’s say someone is riding on a bus from Jerusalem to Bnei Brak, and we ask him: “To where are you going?” and he replies, “I forgot”. How can such a thing be?! If he forgot where he’s going, he’s probably on the wrong bus! Even if he isn’t on the wrong bus, the fact that he forgets where he’s going shows that he has a big issue going on inside.

We all know what the *Mesillas Yescharim* says (that the true good is Hashem), but the question is how much we succeed in actualizing this fact in our daily living. How much do we think about it, how much do we feel it?

This disconnect that people have can go very far. It’s even possible that a person is in middle of *davening*, and he is so spaced out that he forgets that he’s *davening*! A person has to be aware of whatever he’s doing. If a person is driving a car, it’s dangerous if he spaces out for even one second. Our *Avodas Hashem* as well needs our constant focus.

Why are people disconnected from the truth that we know from *Mesillas Yescharim*, that the “true good” is closeness to Hashem? A person has to arrive at the recognition that the only desire to have in life is to become close to Hashem. But in order to reach this, one has to first realize what

the *true good* in life is. “See that I have given before you the life and the goodness, death and evil; and you shall choose life.”¹ In order to “choose life”, we first must be very clear what “good” means.

Anyone who learns the words of *Mesillas Yescharim* knows what the “true good” is, but one’s heart doesn’t feel that way; it feels the opposite. The heart is initially a *lev even*, a “heart of stone”, until we can get it to become a *lev basar*, a soft heart of flesh. Naturally, materialism has a stronger hold on a person, and he feels that the world’s materialism is the “good” in life.

Until a person realizes that materialistic desires of this world are nothing, as long as a person never feels the words of the *Mesillas Yescharim* that only closeness to Hashem is the true good and that everything else is worthless – then his heart will feel that this world is the “good.” A person can’t desire both this world and the next; the *Chovos HaLevovos* writes that this world and the next world are like fire and water, which cannot be mixed together.

When a person’s heart doesn’t feel that truth, the mind as well gets affected by this, and what happens is that a person does not live his life with a mindset of how he can act to become closer to Hashem; and life becomes routine.

The root of our *avodah*, then, is to first clarify to ourselves – in our hearts – what is truly good.

Let us give an example from the physical world and learn from it a great lesson. Hashem created people with certain human natures. If you ask most people what is good in the world, the answer is: “Money.” This is not just a verbal statement. This is the whole way people are living their life – their entire essence is screaming out, “I love money.” They think and talk about it all day. They don’t just *know* about money – they *live* for it. When a person lives money, he develops a sense of smell for money, and he can smell out what will make him get more money.

Now let us think about this kind of desire, when it comes to spirituality. When a person knows what the true good is but he doesn’t live it, naturally, he won’t run after it, and he won’t either sense what will help him get to it. Only if a person is truly dedicated to searching for the truth will Hashem give him the inner senses that will show him what to avoid and what to aspire to in life.

The Beginning of Avodas Hashem: Establish Yourself on the Good Path

We know that *teshuvah* generally means to repent over our deeds, big or small. But there is another kind of *teshuvah*, and it is more basic: to return our *soul* to the proper path.

The *Shaarei Teshuvah* writes, “One who has always gone on an improper path and his sins have overtaken him every day, and he continues to sin...the first thing that this person must do to

¹ (*Devorim* 30: 15-19).

repent is to leave his ways and his evil thoughts, and to accept upon himself that he will never again sin.”

What is the improper path that one is originally on? What is the person doing wrong? His problem is that he doesn't know what the true good is; he doesn't feel it in his heart, and when he doesn't feel it in his heart, his actions will reflect this and he will lead a life of sin.

So before a person begins to correct his deeds, he has to think into the root of the problem. Why does a person forget basic fundamentals about life? Why aren't the facts burning intensely within him? Even if a person decides that he will improve his deeds, if he hasn't wondered about what has been causing all the problems, it is highly unlikely that he will succeed. Even if he's *davening* better, it won't be from his heart, and he won't either become closer to Hashem through it.

Only by first working on the inner point – by clarifying to oneself what the true good is – can a person have hope in proceeding. His wish to pursue this will be no less intense than the people in the world who pursue money every second.

When a person is clear what the true good is, it won't be an “*avodah*” for him; it will instead feel natural. “Whoever separates from You is like someone who has been separated from life.” When a person feels that Torah and mitzvos are life itself, he naturally will not leave Torah and mitzvos. But when people have more feelings about this world than they do about *Avodas Hashem*, and *Avodas Hashem* is just some intellectual knowledge to them, then it will be very difficult to maintain their *Avodas Hashem*.

Therefore, every person, at the beginning of his way, must clarify to himself what he lives for, and what the true good in life is. After one clarifies this, he needs to clarify what will bring him to there, and what he needs to avoid. Only after this should one attempt to actually correct his deeds.

(We are not referring to actual sins, which one must stop doing, immediately. We are referring to actions that we do by rote; we mean that we cannot put heart into what we do unless we sense what the true good).

Revealing the Inner Point of the Heart

Reb Yisrael Salanter zt”l wrote that our heart consists of inner forces and outer forces. There are many interpretations of his statement, but there is an inner point to what he said always remains true.

Reb Yisrael Salanter gave a parable to explain the concept. Once there was a certain great *Rosh Yeshiva* who unfortunately had a rebellious son, and his father had given up hope on him. He also had a student whom he loved with all his heart - equal to the love between David and

Yehonasan. He would sit all day with his student and teach him, nourishing him both physically and spiritually, and he was totally bound up in love with him. His son, though, kept a distance from him, and he was never around much. As the days went on, the relationship with his student grew and grew, while the relationship with his son weakened and ebbed away more and more.

Then a fire suddenly broke out in middle of the night in the dormitory. They woke up the *Rosh Yeshiva* and told him that the dormitory is burning, and that he only has enough time to save either his beloved student – or his estranged son. Who will the *Rosh Yeshiva* save?

Here, says Reb Yisrael Salanter, is where the truth in one's soul is revealed. The father will instinctively save his son rather than his student. Why? Because deep inside his soul, the father has an attachment to his son, and it is an internal bond. The connection he had with his student was only superficial, and when the moment of truth comes to choose between them, the internal bond he has with his son resurfaces. He will choose his estranged son's life over his beloved student's.

The bond which we have with Hashem is a father-son relationship; “*You are children to Hashem, your G-d.*” It is a deep, internal connection. It is the innermost point of every Jew's heart. It is only the outer layer of a Jew that can get swayed by the *yetzer hora* to become attached to the materialism of this world; every Jew (unless he is from the *Erev Rav*) still has an inner point in him that is always there, and there are times in which his true self emerges.

As an example, there were Jews who gave themselves up to be killed *al kiddush Hashem* rather than sin, even though their lives lacked a connection with Hashem. That innermost point in every Jew is there, deep down.

Our *avodah* thus is to reveal that inner point that is already in us. Instead of being forced to reveal the innermost point in us, *chas v'shalom*, we can bring ourselves to it even now, before we are tested to do so.

“Always Repent A Day Before You Die”

How can we do it? We need to remove the layer of superficiality covering our heart, and instead reveal the inner layer of ourselves.

Earlier we mentioned that once a week, a person should be in solitude and reflect with Hashem for a few hours at a time. What does a person do during this time? Should one just repent over his deeds? No, this is not where to begin. One has to begin with the point we are speaking about now: remember why we are living.

First of all, a person has to make sure that he really wants to live the true kind of life. One should ask himself that perhaps he is merely fooling himself. If a person is truthful with himself, he will discover that he is actually very attached to this physical world.

Upon this discovery, what can a person indeed do to sever his attachment to this world? There are several ways, and we will only mention here the shorter way.

We do not know how much time we will have and what today or tomorrow will bring, so we have no choice but to adapt the statement of the Sages, “Always repent a day before you die” (and we never know when we will die). A person does not know what was decreed upon him on Rosh HaShanah. If so, one has to feel that maybe today is his last day alive!

Maybe you will counter, “I am not terminally ill, so this is ridiculous to assume that maybe I will die today.” But this is a mistake. We all know that even healthy people die, because Hashem is the One who takes the soul away, and He can take anyone whom He chooses. We all know people who unfortunately suddenly developed a life-threatening illness one day. These stories happen every day, and anyone who has gone through such a thing knows of the feeling that there is never a guarantee to our life.

So if we want to realize how temporary this world is, we should think about those sick people in the world. If someone is a little more opened up to this idea, he should talk to those sick people and hear what they have to say. You can give them encouragement, but the point of this is to hear that dreadful feeling from a live person: “Until now I thought I was for sure going to live out the rest of my life, but now my life is totally on the line.”

So before one goes to sleep at night, he should think simply: “Who says I will get up tomorrow?”

This awareness can change a person’s whole life. Things that were previously important to you will then lose their importance, and things that are truly important will begin to be felt by your heart.

None of us has written a will and testament yet. Why not? It is because we think that only dying people write a will. We have forgotten that Hashem is the one who gives life and takes away life, and there are no guarantees to our life.

The *sefer Reishis Chochmah* brings that the first aspect of *teshuvah* for one’s sins is to “give up” this world. How can a person give up this world? Only by becoming aware that this might be his last day on earth. Then, everything is different. If you are ever by the bedside of a dying person who truly feared Hashem in his life, you can see that his feelings and thoughts are totally about spiritual matters, and he isn’t thinking about his physical situation.

A person shouldn’t wait for Hashem to bring him to such a situation that forces him to see the truth. A person can get to that feeling of the truth without that.

A person should sit, once a week, and first think why he is living. He should think that life and death are up to Hashem. He should think that the revival of the death will not only be an event of the future, but that He is doing it every second. He should clarify that the purpose of his life on this world is to search for his Creator.

After some time a person will feel, “I know the truth, but I don’t feel it. How can I bring myself to feel the truth all the time, that I must search for Hashem always, and that only this is good?”

After this a person should begin to give up this world. He can do this by remembering stories in which people discovered that their life is now on the line, and he should imagine what he would do if he was told that he will soon die. If a person just thinks about this for five minutes, without a doubt, the whole way he leads his life will change!

Such thinking should be done slowly and patiently. It understandably takes time, and five minutes or ten minutes of this will not be enough. One should thus take a pen and paper and write down what he would do if he was told that he has thirty days left to live, how we will spend his schedule for the next month. Then, a person should also write down how he would spend his life if he knows that he has a full life ahead of him; the new schedule will look totally different.

The Next Step

Let’s say a person concludes that maybe indeed he won’t be around in thirty days from now. What should he think now?

One should continuously think that Hashem is the One who gives life or death, and there is no guarantee to life. Every day we hear of people who suddenly die, when just the day before they were walking around totally carefree. This is not just a mere possibility. A person has no guarantee that he will be around tomorrow, and each person has to think that maybe today is his last day on earth.

This should not make a person become sad or morbid about death. It instead should cause a person the opposite feeling – he should become happy that he has merited to clarify his purpose on this world, to know what he lives for.

When a person wants to buy something, he should consider that maybe he won’t be around in a month for now, and so maybe it’s not worth it to buy. No one should ignore his basic needs, but when it comes to buying some luxury that you could do without, think about if it’s really worth it to buy, if there’s a chance that you might not be around in a month.

When a person lives his life with a feeling that this world is fleeting, he disconnects from materialistic matters, and he will then be very close to arriving at the truth.

The point of this *avodah* here is to reflect about how we need to disconnect from the evil pull that is on us, and when we remove that evil, it will become a lot easier to direct ourselves toward the truth in life.

Will We Choose This On Our Own – Or Will We Be Forced?

There are things as well one needs to reflect about, but in this chapter, we have only picked one point to work on: to clarify what the true good on this world is. As long as a person hasn't clarified it to himself, he forgets what true good is, and he won't be able to live the words of the *Mesillas Yesharim* that all of our actions are supposed to bring us closer to Hashem.

If a person never realizes what the true good in life is, not only will he have an empty life; he will have to realize anyway at some point what the true good is, but the question is, will he be forced to realize it, or will he utilize his free will and choose to realize it on his own?

Even if a person never makes the willing choice to disconnect from the physicality of this world, after he dies, he will realize it. But after death, this transition is very painful, and it is much less painful of a decision if a person make it already as he lives on this world.

Our Reward In The Next World

There is another point one can think about to help him disconnect from the physicality of this world, and that is that one should know that for every amount of enjoyment he has on this world, he will have to pay for it. Reb Yisrael Salanter zt"l said that this world is like an expensive hotel – after you enjoy yourself, you are given the bill. A person can lose all his reward for his Torah and mitzvos when he comes to the next world, since he enjoyed himself very much on this world.

One should thus be very afraid that maybe he will lose his reward in the next world by being so immersed in worldly interests, and that when he comes to the next world, he will be left with only a tiny reward, because it has all been swapped for this world's pleasures.

If a person knows that the true good is Hashem, then he can be sure that his Torah and mitzvos will earn him a true reward, and he will have the real closeness and attachment with Hashem. But if he is tied to this world's pleasures, *chas v'shalom*, and these are all his aspirations in life – his reward in the next world will get replaced with something very cheap (may Heaven have mercy on him).

Thus, everyone has to at some point give up this world, for three reasons:

How do I know that I will remain with all my material gains from this world? Maybe tomorrow I won't have them anymore, because I might die?

If I don't decide in his life to disconnect from materialism, I will have to become disconnected from it after I die anyway, and then this change will be very painful.

Just for running after silly pleasures like food or honor, I am giving up my reward in the next world, by swapping spiritual pleasure for physical pleasure.



Let us summarize here what we have learned: a person has to clarify the truth.

He should look around at the items in his house and ask himself what he needs and what he doesn't; maybe some needy people could use something in your house? Of course, ask your family if they mind if it's given away, and use your senses. The point is that if something in your house isn't needed to give you more *yishuv hadaas* (peace of mind), it's just a luxury, and you should learn to give it up. Don't do this in an external way; do it happily.

Rav Dessler zt"l would say that the jail is full of people who are deprived of worldly pleasures. If so, why don't the Jewish inmates there merit *ruach hakodesh*? He explained that although they are very far removed from physical pleasures, they were forced to do so, and such abstinence does not give a person *ruach hakodesh*.

When a person decides to abstain from worldly pleasures, it has to be a happy decision, out of a recognition that this world is a waste of time.

May Hashem help each person clarify to himself what the true good is, and to separate from the materialism of this world.

1.8 | Aspirations for Greatness

Greatness – A Gift that Comes After Much Effort

Reb Chatzkel Levenstein zt”l, the great Mashgiach, once said that the true aspiration of a *yeshiva* student, of anyone who seeks to grow, is to strive to become a great person. Usually, though, one is far from aspiring for this. Why is this so?

A person naturally thinks to himself, “In every generation, there can be *Gedolim* (great leaders), but I am definitely not one of them. Some people are born very special, and they have special inborn abilities, and they are destined for greatness. But me? I was born with a very difficult nature, and I have a certain past. I grew up in a certain home that holds me back from greatness. My situation in life doesn’t allow me to become a *Gadol* (Torah leader)...”

Almost everyone thinks this way, and naturally, people lose their aspirations to become a *gadol*. Not only do people lose their hope to become elevated spiritually, but they say that they cannot grow beyond a certain limit.

That is how people naturally think, but Reb Chatzkel came and said that this is a mistaken notion. Each person as an individual has to realize that he can sprout into a great tree – he can become one of the *gedolei hador!*

Let us try to remove some of the mistaken notions that people have which prevent them from aspiring for greatness.

When any of us sees a *gadol*, naturally, we compare ourselves to the *gadol*. For example, a person sees a *gadol*, and he thinks about how much of a *masmid* (diligent) the *gadol* is, and then he thinks, “I can never learn for so many hours like he does. I don’t have the *kochos* (abilities). Intense *hasmadah* (diligence) just isn’t my thing. I can’t understand how it is humanly possible to learn like him. Maybe for a few days I can learn diligently, but to learn like that my whole life? That, I can’t do. I need some relaxation and some other activities in my life.” A person cannot understand how a person is able to live a life that is totally dedicated to Hashem.

However, Chazal² tell us that Hashem says to the Jewish people, “My son, open for me an opening of repentance that is the size of a needle, and I will open for you an opening the size of a hallway.” Chazal here have revealed an awesome fundamental point: It is really not humanly possible to live totally for Hashem! A person shouldn’t think that it is not only him and others who cannot do it. Even the greatest people in the world cannot do it on their own.

² *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 5: 2

What does a *gadol* have, then, that others don't have? He has made for himself a small "opening", and from that opening, he has merited to receive the Heavenly gift known as "an opening the size of a hallway."

A person gives up from the start that he will ever achieve greatness, because he is focused on the levels reached by a *gadol*, and he says to himself, "This, I will never reach."

What a person must realize is that all of this success came to the *gadol* not because of his own efforts, but because he merited it as a gift from Heaven. It's all a kindness from Hashem that he merited it; it's not humanly possible to achieve such greatness. With this outlook, a person is able to aspire that he too can live a life to be dedicated only for Hashem.

If a person doesn't believe in himself that he can become a *gadol*, this is not always because he doesn't believe in his abilities. It is because he doesn't believe that Hashem is the one who gives out such a gift to a person.

Our entire *avodah* is to try our hardest, each to his own level. Beyond that point is all a gift from Hashem. The amount of spiritual success one merits does not depend at all on his efforts. You can have a person who tried very little but merited a large dose of spiritual growth, and you can also have a person who tried very hard but only received a minimal gift for his efforts. This is because each person has a certain job to fulfill, and he gets the gift from Heaven when he fulfills that job; it doesn't depend on how much effort he put it, but rather on if he fulfilled his mission upon him or not.

Maybe a person will ask that this is unfair. But the answer to this is as Chazal say, "I toiled, and I found" – that even when a person tries, his success did not come because of his efforts, and he instead merely "found" success. Of course, a person receives reward for all his efforts, but beyond that is what Hashem gives as a gift to a person, and the gift cannot be rationalized or complained about; no one can say, "Why did so and so get that heavenly gift, while I didn't?"

If any of the *gedolim* would have received their spiritual attainment according to the level of effort they put in, they wouldn't have become *gedolim*! Chazal state that the righteous humble themselves before Hashem, even as Hashem gives them honor.³ A *gadol* realizes that all of his closeness to Hashem and all his many qualities are all heavenly gifts which he did not get on his own.

Hashem gives each person a certain mission, according to his abilities. When a person completes the task given to him, Hashem gives him spiritual success as a gift. On a deeper note, a person who has exerted all his abilities has removed his "I", and his inner self is revealed – the G-dly spark within him, which is unlimited, for it is a part of Hashem, Who is Infinite (*Ein Sof*).

³ *Chullin 89a*

Thus, in order for one to become a *gadol*, he doesn't need to possess astounding abilities of the soul. He just needs to give up his self, and when he does that, he will become connected to the *midas harachamim* (trait of mercy) of Hashem, and he will then receive endless gifts.

The Chazon Ish writes in a letter that at first, a person has to work very hard to succeed spiritually, but after that, "a new gate is opened to him, which his mind delights in endlessly." How can a person merit this? This is when a person merits Hashem's help, Who bestows him with heavenly radiance – beyond his normal human comprehension. That is where true understanding starts.

If a person doesn't aspire to become a great person, it will be very difficult for him to grow at all spiritually. Even his already present goals in life will ebb away.

One should therefore decide that he will become a *gadol!*

This does not mean to get carried away with himself and be a *baal gaavah* (haughty person). Rather, it is for a person to believe that Hashem is entirely kind and compassionate, and when a person tries his hardest, Hashem bestows upon Him according to his endless goodness.

Hashem can give a person unlimited attainment. If our success would depend on our own efforts alone, then our growth would be very limited. But our success doesn't come from us - it comes from Hashem, Who is unlimited in what He can give us!

The aspiration to become great has to fill one's entire being. One's entire mind and heart should be about this. We see, *l'havdil*, that when someone wants to become a politician, he already had a desire to become the president since he was little. Anyone who didn't have such an ambition when he was younger usually doesn't end up becoming a politician. This is a desire for falsity, but it when it comes to *Avodas Hashem*, the desire for greatness is a true one only when a person recognizes that greatness only comes from Hashem, not from one's individual strengths.

If a person is truthful with himself, he can see that can't do anything on his own. If he is even more truthful, he can see also that Hashem is capable of anything, and He can give to us as much as He wants.

We Must Be Patient In Our Avodas Hashem

However, there is a problem especially in our generation, which hampers people from attaining greatness.

There is a rule that in order for a person to reach greatness, he needs to try very hard for years, and he needs to be very patient with this. Many people in today's generation are not aware of this

rule and thus become impatient in their *Avodas Hashem*, expecting to see immediate improvement.

Imagine a farmer who comes to his field on the first day of the planting season and he is disappointed that the crops haven't grown yet. This is unrealistic, as it takes several months of planting and plowing in order for anything to grow. Similarly, an impatient person wants to see immediate results in his *Avodas Hashem* - but this is impossible. He wouldn't be able to be a farmer either, because he has no idea how to be patient!

As the generations grow closer to Moshiach, patience when it comes to our spiritual growth gets weaker. There is actually a deep reason for this. Since Moshiach is closer, the soul inside feels that there is very little time left to work on spiritual growth, and this is why people get impatient. However, although this feeling is correct, it has to be used correctly, in its proper place. Let us explain.

The Mishnah in *Avos* (2:15) states, "The day is short and the labor is long; the workers are lazy, and the reward is great, and the owner is knocking."

When the day is short, what does the worker do? He might act quicker as a result, and he will finish his work quickly as a result. This is wonderful. But another kind of worker will think that since there is very little time in the day, he might as well just give up.

This is the nature of our generation: There isn't enough time to work so hard in *Avodas Hashem*, and therefore, people immediately want to see it all finished. But in *Avodas Hashem*, we need patience. Chazal⁴ say, "Today is for action, and tomorrow is for reward." If somebody wants to live "tomorrow" already today, he is really saying that he doesn't want to be involved in his current *Avodas Hashem*. Living like this, a person will never get the true reward.

There are only a few rare individuals in every generation who have merited to taste true spiritual pleasure on this world without having to work hard for it. Most people, naturally, will have to work hard on this world to grow spiritually, and only in the next world will we enjoy spiritual bliss.

However, a person naturally wants to see results from his *Avodas Hashem* right away. If he doesn't see enjoyment out of it, he at least wants to see some growth right away. But this is impossible! We need great patience for any point that we work on. We have to wait many months until we can merit to enter the true world of *Avodas Hashem*.

When a person hears an important matter and he understands it intellectually, he might immediately wish to internalize it in his heart. But the heart is initially a 'heart of stone'! That is

⁴ *Eruvin 22a*

the way Hashem made it, and in order to transform our heart of stone into a soft heart of flesh, we need to work very hard.

Realizing That It's All From Hashem

To what does this apply? In the previous chapters, we advised to do *hisbodedus* (solitude) and *hisbonenus* (reflection) once a week, for a few hours at a time. There are people who try this for one week, and when it “doesn’t go” for them, they immediately give up and say, “This isn’t for me. These are lofty matters, and they are meant only for others to work on. It’s good advice, but it can only work for very special people in the generation.”

But according to what we have said in this chapter, we know that this is incorrect. When a person declares “This isn’t for me”, he’s basically saying that he doesn’t have the ability for it, and that he simply can’t do it. He is wrong, because although it is humanly impossible to sit for so many hours and reflect, anyone can still do it, if we turn to Hashem to help us do it! A person should sit and say, “*Ribono shel olam*, I don’t have any energy for this, even for a minute. But I know that You can give me the strength to do it. Can you just give me help for one minute to do this?”

When people don’t believe that they can sit so long and do *hisbonenus*, it really stems from a lack of simple belief in Hashem, who gives us strength every moment. A person who feels that he simply can’t do it should know that this is the key to enable him to have the strength, because now he can ask Hashem, “*Ribono shel olam*, my strength and motivation is weak. If You don’t give me the energy for this, I have nothing on my own to give me the energy.”

When a person realizes that whatever he can attain is anyway only a gift from Heaven, he will then be opened up the gates of sustenance from Heaven.

The truth is that it’s erroneous to begin with for a person to ever give up on matters of *Avodas Hashem* and say, “I can’t do this.” When a person feels that he can’t become great, then by the same logic he shouldn’t be able to get back to his house. A person believes, though, that he can get back to his house, and he doesn’t doubt his abilities. But if you think about it, this is denying Hashem! If a person believes that it was Hashem who enables him to get back to his house, so can he believe that it is Hashem who can bring you to whatever it is that you want to achieve.

When people feel “I can’t do it” when it comes to *ruchniyus* (spiritual matters), it is not because they can’t do it – it is rather all coming from the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination), who tricks a person that things are up to his energy or not. The truth, however, is that we cannot do anything on our own. The greater a person becomes, the more he realizes how pathetic it is to be a human, and he’s not doing this to be humble; it is rather a simple recognition that everything is from Hashem, and Hashem can give us anything.

That is the first reason why a person cannot say about these matters that “it’s not for me.”

Only A Stubborn Person Is Successful

A second reason why the argument of “This isn’t not for me” is erroneous is, because the Vilna Gaon said that only “a stubborn person is successful”. If someone isn’t persistent in matters of *Avodas Hashem*, he will never be successful.

This is a fundamental which applies to all areas of life. Imagine if a father sends his child to yeshiva, and on the first day the child comes back and says, “This is not for me!” The father, upon hearing this, will probably consider another school for his child – perhaps a school that is a bit different, which will cater more to his child’s needs. This is, however, an incorrect approach to take. All children go to school, so why should this child be any different? Just because he had one bad day in school is enough to conclude that this school is not for him, and that he needs to learn in a less regular kind of school?!

It’s a dangerous way to live life, both with oneself and toward others. People use their human abilities as a barometer: “If everyone can do it, then I can do it too. But if everyone can’t do it, then I can’t either do it.” A person who thinks like this acts like a sheep following the rest of the flock, and he just does what everyone else is doing. If one’s aspirations are limited to what everyone else is aspiring to, then there will be no aspirations.

What we first need to do is to know that we all have a unique personality, and we should not base our achievement on how others think. No two people are exactly the same. We all have our individual strengths; why should someone else’s goals be the same as your goals?

The main difficulty that people struggle with is that they try very hard but aren’t seeing success. A person then concludes, “This isn’t for me.” Why does a person come to such a conclusion? Because he tried once, twice, or maybe three times, and he wasn’t successful...

This is the main point which holds back people from achieving. With the attitude of “This isn’t for me”, a person has no hope. Of course, he will still be able to learn Torah and do mitzvos, but he will never get to an inner kind of life, to a life of a pure soul. If a person doesn’t stubbornly work hard to grow, he won’t get to anything.

The real reason why people aren’t growing (it is at least one of the reasons) is because people don’t have patience in their *Avodas Hashem*.

When a person opens up a business, usually he will not make any money the first two years. It is just an investment. Only after some time will he begin to see profit. If people are willing to make investments when it comes to worldly matters, even though they won’t see profit right away, why

can't they be the same when it comes to *Avodas Hashem*? Why do people give up so fast on growing?

Maybe one will answer that when it comes to material matters, everyone knows that this is the way it works: the first two years of your business you don't make any profit, and only after that do you see success. But if you ask any person who truly serves Hashem if they felt anything after a day or two, or even after a month or two, you will see that it indeed took a lot of time until they saw success; but they believed all along that their "Boss" will pay His "workers", and they knew that none of their efforts are ever being wasted.

The possuk says, "*Those who plant with tears, will reap with joy.*" At first, we "plant with tears." When Hashem wills to give us success after we make the effort, it is then that they will "reap with joy." We must be aware that *Avodas Hashem* takes hard work – on all areas. We might have to try even a hundred times at just one point, and maybe at the 101st time we will merit heavenly assistance.

May Hashem help us that we should not be of those who do not appreciate their value, those who do not realize that it is up to Hashem to help us receive any success. Instead, may each of us truly aspire for greatness – to give a *nachas ruach* (satisfaction) to our Creator.

1.9 | *Temimus: Simple Earnestness*

Our Tefillos Need Temimus/Simple Earnestness

To continue our discussion we have begun, we will discuss another point which holds back many people from reaching their *pnimiyus* (inner world) in their *Avodas Hashem*.

A *bechor* (firstborn) is called “*the beginning of your first-born.*” Yet a first-born is not the total beginning; it comes from a father and mother. The word *bechor* has in it the letters *beis*, *chof*, and *reish*, which can be rearranged to read “*harkavah*” – mixture. A first-born was originally integrated as a mixture in its father and mother. This shows us that before there is a *harkavah* – a mixture, which connotes something complicated – there is something that comes before. This is the power of *peshitus*, simplicity, in a person. Without *harkavah*, there is no *peshitus*, and without *peshitus*, there is no inner depth to life, and a person will just live life superficially.

That is the concept, and now we will try to draw this matter closer to us.

One of the early *sefarim* of the Jewish people is *Sefer Tehillim*, which was written by Dovid Hamelech. Chazal say that Dovid Hamelech, in his *ruach hakodesh*, included in *Sefer Tehillim* all of the *tefillos* that every Jew needs to daven.

Since we know this, it would seem that every Jew should be immersed in saying *Tehillim*, and to try to say some *Tehillim* every day. Yet, to our surprise, this is very hard to do. People try to say *Tehillim*, and they actually find this very difficult!

It is perplexing. There is no one who can say about *Tehillim* that “this is not for me.” When it comes to learning, a person can claim that a certain style of learning is not for him, and that it’s not for his soul. But no one can say this about *Tehillim*. Chazal say that *Tehillim* contains in it every Jewish soul until Moshiach comes, and it can be applied to anyone at any time in any generation. If so, it should follow that every Jew should be very attached to saying *Tehillim*, yet we do not see this. There must be something that is holding back people from connecting to *Tehillim*, something that isn’t letting us pour forth our heart when we say it.

The reason for the difficulty in saying *Tehillim* is because Dovid Hamelech says, “*And I will walk in wholeheartedness.*” (*Tehillim* 26:1). To be “wholehearted with Hashem” – *temimus* – is to be simple, and it is the opposite of being complicated in any way (*harkavah*). As long as a person can only relate to *harkavah* – complicating matters – and he hasn’t yet reached his simplicity, his *peshitus*; **his simple earnestness, his *temimus*** – it will be very hard to *daven* any true *tefillah* when saying *sefer Tehillim*.

Tefillah is the gate to entering all *Avodas Hashem*. “*This is the gate toward Hashem, and the righteous shall come in it.*” As long as the gates of prayer are closed from a person, he is outside the gate, and he’s not even in the entranceway.

We are not speaking of high levels here. We mean that in order for a person to have a connection to *pnimiyus* and *ruchniyus*, this must be preceded by the right kind of *Tefillah*. In order for our *tefillos* to look the way they should, they must emanate from our *temimus* (our simple earnestness).

Learning Torah with Temimus/Simple Earnestness

What is holding back our *temimus*?

It is written, “*A boor does not know this and a fool cannot understand it.*” (Tehillim 92: 7). What ‘boor’ is the possuk referring to? It seems to be speaking about an ignoramus who has never learned Torah, but as for us – we are wise and can understand things...

The truth is that all of us – from the smallest child to the greatest person – have to realize that we are all in the category of a “*boor who does not know*”!

Compare this to asking a five-year child about the *aleph beis*, and he is able to point to all the letters correctly. If the child gets all the answers, he feels that he knows a lot. That is a child’s outlook. What about the adult who is learning with him? Is he considered smart for knowing the *aleph beis*? Compared to what he is supposed to know, knowing the *aleph beis* bears no accomplishment whatsoever.

Our situation is the same, and it’s even worse. The Torah is “*wider than the sea.*” Hashem and the Torah “are one”, and just like Hashem is endless, so is the Torah endless. There is no one who can understand the entire Torah, both when it comes to its size as well as its profundity. Whatever we know in the Torah is like a drop in the ocean, so we are all in the category of a “boor.”

It’s not enough for us just to hear these words; they have to enter our innards. The problem is that people think they are very smart and that they understand everything – each to his own level. A person asks some questions and because of this he thinks that he is unbelievably wise, but it’s all very minute in comparison to the depth of the Torah.

A person has to feel deep down that his wisdom is really very lacking and destitute, his concentration is poor, and his thinking is poor. This should not be done in a way that causes a person to feel lowly about himself; it should be used to build oneself, for one can realize that part of our purpose on this world is to realize how limited we are.

A person must learn Torah, but it has to be accompanied with the feeling that he knows nothing. The Chazon Ish wrote that “I am not ashamed to admit that a human being is all about making mistakes.”

If these words are internalized in the soul, a person will be able to reveal the innermost point – the point of *temimus* inherent in every Jew’s soul. As long as a person thinks that intellectual prowess is where he will find perfection, he is being held back from *temimus*.

Temimus Brings D’veykus

Let us expand the implications of this discussion even more.

Let’s say we go over to a person and we ask him to sit for a half hour and say *Tehillim*. What will be the response? He will likely think, “What will I gain from saying *Tehillim*?! I need to learn Gemara in-depth and come up with *chiddushim* (insights), but to say *Tehillim*?! You just say a few *pesukim* and nothing remains of it.”

Why do people have this mistaken mentality? It is because people erroneously think that using your intellect is more prestigious than using your simple *temimus* of a Jew. But the truth is that ***temimus* is worth much more than all intellectual matters!**

Some people even think that *temimus* is a bad *middah*! This is a very superficial outlook. The truth is that there is no greater *middah* than *temimus*. Yaakov Avinu, the “choicest of the *Avos*,” is called an *ish tam*, a “wholesome person”; he is praised for his *temimus*.

When a great person has *temimus*, his quality of *temimus* is brought out, and through this, a person comes to have *d’veykus* (attachment) with Hashem.

When people have *temimus* but they don’t use it to connect to Hashem - like if they know how to act simple and un-complicating, but nothing to do with being close to Hashem – then the *temimus* is improper. But when one’s *temimus* stems from the fact that there is a Creator – and from this recognition, a person understands that he has no comprehension of the Creator – such *temimus* embodies *emes* (truth), and this is the meaning of *Toras Emes*, a “Torah of truth.”

Instead of aspiring for intellectual matters and to sharpen the brain, one should instead aspire to become a Jew who acts with *temimus*. “*You shall be wholehearted with Hashem your G-d*” (Devorim 18:13). *Temimus* brings a person to become attached with Hashem, to gain the quality of *emes*.

As long as a person places emphasis on being brainy and he feels that this is what will perfect him, he loses the purpose of life. “*And you shall cleave to Hashem your G-d, and you shall all live today.*” (Devorim 4:4). A true kind of life is to be attached to Hashem, and the only way to get

there is “*you shall be wholehearted with Hashem your G-d.*” If you want to be “with” Hashem, you need to be “wholehearted” – to have *temimus*.

The Way To “Talk in Learning” With Others

There is a certain custom among the Jewish people that is a holy act, but it needs some improvement. This is that when two learned Jews meet and they have merited to taste the enjoyment of learning Torah, they will casually ask each other, “What are you learning?” They will then get into lengthy Torah discussions and come up with *chiddushim*, and they will engage in *pilpul* (back and forth discussion) with each other.

We need to make a small change, though, when it comes to this practice.

Chazal say (Kiddushin 30b) that when a father and son or a teacher and student learn Torah together, in the beginning they are like enemies toward each other, and they don’t budge from their opinions; but in the end, they come to love each other. Our eyes can see, though, that although people carry out the first part of this statement of Chazal – learning Torah with another person – the second part, which is the love that they are supposed to come to, unfortunately never happens. What is the reason for this?

When people engage with each other in *pilpul*, they are really using a power in the soul called “*daas hamavdeles*” – the power to “separate” information using your mental capabilities. The problem that often comes from using our *daas hamavdeles* is that it creates separation as well with people! In order to unify with others, our *daas* will not do it. We need *temimus* for this.

When a person comes to his friend to “talk in learning” with him, and his entire mind and soul is immersed in the learning – but he lacks *temimus* – it will be very hard for them to come to love each other at the end of the give-and-take discussion.

Only when the innermost point of our soul, *temimus*, is alive and working, can the talking in learning bring about a unity between them; if they are talking in learning with each other because they *really want* to learn Torah, then the *temimus* will be reflected in how they talk with each other, and only then will they come to love each other. But if this is not the intention in the conversation, they won’t come to that love.

Understanding the Torah Is Only Possible By Connecting To Its Giver

How can we make this matter practical for us? As we said before, every word in the Torah is a part of Hashem; “Hashem and the Torah are one.” Just like Hashem is endless, so is His Torah endless.

Thus, whenever one learns Torah – whether it is Chumash or Gemara – he is involved with Hashem, with the Infinite, Who cannot be comprehended. Not only is it impossible to have a complete understanding of anything in the Torah, but we never even begin to understand, because it is impossible to understand the G-dly wisdom of the Torah from our human comprehension.

How, then, can we ever hope to understand anything in Torah?

Only if we receive the understanding from Hashem! If a person is connected to Hashem and he is one with Him, of him it can be applied, “Hashem and the Jewish people are one”, and from that attachment with Hashem, he will receive true understanding.

The Proper Attitude To Have Towards Learning Torah

We need *temimus* in general, as well as when it comes to specific areas.

There are two different areas of comprehension in the Torah. One is called *chochmah* (wisdom), and the other area is *kedushah* (holiness). *Chochmah* are the intellectual matters, while *kedushah* are matters of abstinence. The Jewish people are called a “*holy nation*”, and thus we mainly have to connect with Hashem through *kedushah*.

When a person sits down to learn Torah, he has to also realize that there is *kedushah* here, not just *chochmah*. If a person learns with this awareness, the way he learns will be totally different, and the difference will come to play when he can't understand something. If he's only interested in *chochmah* and not in *kedushah*, then when he can't understand something, he won't learn it. But when a person aims for *kedushah* as well, he will learn it even when he can't understand it. He learns whether he understands it or not.

We do not mean to imply that we don't need to understand what we learn. We have a *mitzvah* to try to understand what we learn, but our main search has to be directed towards the *kedushah* of the Torah, not in the *chochmah* of the Torah.

Therefore, one should think about this point for a long time and realize that as long as he is missing *temimus*, his Torah learning will never amount to anything. One has to awaken his inner yearnings and to reach simple *temimus* with Hashem. To work on gaining *temimus*, one has to get used to learning parts in the Torah every day which he doesn't understand.

We can mainly work on this by getting used to saying *Tehillim* every day. *Tehillim* contains every Jew's soul, so all Jews can connect to it. One should say each word of it happily. Even if you don't understand what you're saying, realize that you are dealing with holy words, composed by one of the greatest people in history.

At first, you won't be able to feel this. We must think to ourselves, however, that to be involved with Torah only an intellectual level is actually what distances one from Hashem, and that only *kedushah* together with *chochmah* can bring a person close to Hashem; from that, a person will find that he can learn parts of Torah that he doesn't understand or doesn't enjoy.

Sometimes a person is learning and he comes across a difficulty, and it bothers him a lot that he doesn't understand. On one hand, this is commendable, but on the other hand, one has to also realize that it was Hashem who brought him to this situation that he doesn't understand, so that he will remember that it's not humanly possible to understand the Torah, and that we don't have to always understand everything.

Concerning Moshe Rabbeinu, it was said, "*Moshe is true, and His Torah is true.*" Moshe was called the "servant" of Hashem, and a servant doesn't ask questions about what his master tells him to do; so did Moshe act like a true servant, never questioning Hashem. If Hashem wants you to understand, then you will understand, and if not, then you won't understand.

We cannot have any comprehension in Torah on our own. We are required to **search** for the understanding, however, because that is our *mitzvah* of learning Torah. But our soul must not be concerned if we understand or not; on a deep note, it's really *gaavah* (arrogance) if a person is upset that he doesn't understand something.

This is a very subtle point, because in the end we still have to toil in Torah and try to understand it. Yet, at the same time, our desire to understand must come from *lishmah* (acting for pure motives), because we want to give pleasure to our Creator – and the desire to understand should not be coming from a personal desire to understand.

Many people who learn Torah are bothered and pained at the fact that they don't learn enough. They think that for this reason, they aren't becoming *gedolim*. We cannot say this is incorrect, but many times people aren't growing in their *ruchniyus* simply for a different reason: because a person is missing the *pnimiyus* which the *gedolim* lived with. When a person lives a superficial kind of life and he isn't really connected to Hashem, his Torah learning isn't either connected to Hashem.

It is not only *how much* we learn that brings us closer to Hashem. The main thing is *what we are feeling* as we learn. A person has to feel that when he is learning, he is involving himself with the Torah of the *Ribono shel olam!* One is not only learning the words of Abaye and Rava; it is G-dly wisdom, and it is not humanly possible to understand their words. We are supposed to learn Torah to give a *nachas ruach* (satisfaction) to our Creator, and not out of a personal desire for knowledge.

If a person is learning and all he's concerned about is the understanding of it, his learning will not bring him to the desired goal. Before a person sits down to learn, he should gather his

thoughts together and talk to Hashem: “*Ribono shel olam*, I am learning because You commanded me to. If You would command me not to learn, I wouldn’t learn, just like on Tisha B’Av when we don’t learn. I am sitting and learning to give You a *nachas ruach*. Even in what I do understand, I am still missing the true understanding and I haven’t yet reached the inner depth of the matter.”

Whenever a person encounters a difficulty in the Gemara and he is trying to understand it, he should first know that it was Hashem who brought him to this situation that he doesn’t have to understand everything.

After this, he should *daven* to Hashem, saying, “*Ribono shel olam*, if You want that I remain with the difficulty and not understand it, then I am prepared to remain that way. But if it is Your will that I should understand, please, grant me *chochmah*, *binah* and *daas* so that I can understand Your words of Torah.”

When you *daven* to Hashem like this, it has to come from a feeling that you are willing to give up everything and become totally humbled to Hashem. Each person should search inside himself and see if he is prepared to remain an ignoramus who cannot learn - if that is what Hashem would will from him!

It is hard to reach this point, but we must try to draw close to it, to live with the feeling that we are willing to remain a simple boor, if Hashem would ever will so.

This is a lengthy topic, and one chapter alone doesn’t encompass the entire matter. We have only mentioned here the roots of the discussion, and we will try with the help of Hashem to expand on these words, as Hashem allows us to.

1.10 | *The Inner Point Is The Simple Earnestness*

Our Focus In Learning

We spoke in the previous chapter about *temimus* (serving Hashem “simply”). We will now try to expand upon this topic and draw the concept closer to our hearts.

When a person sits down to learn, usually his first thought is, “Please, Hashem, give me the understanding in order to know the Torah.”

But the truth is that this has to be the *second* thought that comes to mind, not the *first*. The first thought one needs to have is that he is sitting down to learn Torah because this is the will of Hashem; and since Hashem wants one to understand the Torah, one tries to understand it. Hashem might want from a person that he shouldn’t understand it. One should thus say it verbally and with a full heart that he is prepared to accept it if he won’t understand a thing.

Thus, our main focus when we learn should not only be about if we understand it or not, but also on fulfilling the will of Hashem that we try to understand his Torah. When our intellect is disconnected from our feelings, the intellect then stands by itself, and it is rooted in the sin of Adam when he desired the *eitz hadaas* out of a desire for knowledge. If a person is using his mind and directing it toward what Hashem wants from him, then his mind is attached to the Creator, and such intellect is pure. It becomes a mind that is attached to the *kedushah* of the Torah and not just to the wisdom of Torah.

The more a person learns *lishmah*⁵ - he is concerned about doing the will of Hashem, and not out of a personal desire for knowledge – the closer he is to the inner point of the Torah, to the soul of the Torah.

Serving Hashem, But Not For Ourselves

We do not mean that we don’t have to try to understand Torah. We must try to understand it, but we must know that the reason why we learn Torah is only *to carry out His will*. We need to show Hashem that we are searching for Him. The intellectual aspect in our learning is a garment over our inner mission, and our inner mission needs to be expressed to us through our intellect.

If a person hears of a way for how to serve *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, and he is only searching to uncover his own unique way, without a desire to do His will – in simple words, he is serving

⁵ The topic of “*lishmah*” will be further discussed, on a basic level, in Chapter 13 of this sefer, and on a deeper level in the sixth volume of Bilvavi (chapters 6-7).

himself, not *Hakadosh Baruch Hu!* He's searching for himself! Some people are searching to find themselves in physical pleasure, while others are searching to find Hashem. But you can also have a person who is searching for himself when it comes to spirituality, and his interest is not necessarily about finding Hashem.

This is a dangerous mindset to have. When a person is caught up in physical pursuits, at least he might wake up one day and see that his actions are distancing him from the Creator. But if a person is immersed in *ruchniyus* all the time and he's merely searching to find himself, he might never realize his entire life, *chas v'shalom*, that he is really far from the truth. He might imagine all his life that he serves the Creator, while the truth is that he's serving himself – he's only concerned for his own perfection, and he doesn't yearn to fulfill the will of Hashem.

Chazal teach us (Yoma 72b) that if a person merits, his Torah learning will become like an elixir of life to him, but if he doesn't merit, the Torah will become like poison to him (may Hashem have mercy upon him). When a person learns Torah, or when a person is involved with serving Hashem in any area, it might all become to him like poison one day – *chas v'shalom*. If someone learns Torah *lishmah*, then he merits that the "Torah raises him and exalts him over all actions". But it is also possible that a person will only be elevated all for himself, and this resembles the evil nation of Amalek, who is called *rom*, "exalted." A person has to look for the right kind of exultation – the G-dly kind of exultation, and not to exalt himself.

If a person only pursues a matter (in learning Torah or in any area of *Avodas Hashem*) only intellectually and not out of a desire to search for the Creator, he only receives the external layer of the matter, and he is missing the inner, underlying point of a matter.

If a person is truly searching for spirituality, he is ultimately searching for his soul. If he really wants to reveal his soul, he needs to understand what the soul is and how to search for it. If this search is being done only for a person to find himself, that motivation itself holds back his soul from being revealed.

People mistakenly think that as long as a person leaves physical pursuits and enters the world of spirituality, that this is everything one needs to do. This is wrong, because not all spirituality is necessarily the *right* kind of spirituality; it might all be like a subtle form of darkness that comes upon a person. In Egypt, by the plague of darkness, what was light for a Jew was dark for an Egyptian. This shows us that what is a spiritual light for one person might be a spiritual darkness to another person. We don't mean physical darkness – we mean spiritual darkness.

If a person searches for Hashem, then of him it is written, "*As I sit in darkness, Hashem is a light to me.*" (Michah 7:8). The only light that a person has is from Hashem's light. But if someone is into *ruchniyus* just for its own sake - without Hashem in the picture – he will be in darkness.

Spiritual darkness is called *hester panim*, the concealment of Hashem's radiance. It is a double kind of darkness, because the person thinks that he's with the truth, while he's really very far from Hashem.

If a person approaches learning with "*I need to understand*", he's already holding himself back from truly understanding the Torah, without realizing it.

Dedicating Your Learning

The Arizal writes that before *davening*, one should say that he is accepting upon himself the mitzvah to love all Jews. This is because if a person really wants to connect to Hashem, he needs to integrate with the Jewish people, because a person cannot find Hashem on his own. He cannot be all about his ego.

The Chasam Sofer said that a person has to give away *maaser* (a tenth) of his *ruchniyus* for others. This does not only mean that one has to go out and influence others. Even as a person is sitting alone in the *beis midrash*, he should know that a Jew is never alone, because Hashem is always next to him, as well as all the souls of the Jewish people, who are one with Hashem.

Thus, it is proper that before a person begins to learn, he should decide that he is giving away ten percent of his learning for other Jews. If a person isn't prepared to give up a tenth of his Gan Eden for others, he's for sure only interested in his own gains. A person has to worry for others, though, both when it comes to their physical needs as well as their spiritual needs.

This is a fundamental, basic point: one should stop thinking only about himself, even as he's sitting and learning, and remember that he's only learning to give a *nachas ruach* to Hashem. This is the meaning of what is written, "*Give strength to G-d.*" A Jew has the power to "give" something to the Above. But if a person lives only for himself, then he is far from the goal of his soul.

In order to attain this, a person needs to cry and beg Hashem for this, that He purify his heart and merit him to realize the point of *lishmah*, at all times.

1.11 | *The Very Nature Of The Soul Is Simple Earnestness*

Beyond The Inspiration

There are words we hear which are inspiring, but they can be merely just that – inspiration. Then there are words which go beyond ‘inspiration’ – they are about life. They are matters of the soul.

When a person gets *chizuk* (inspiration) from something he hears, this is of course wonderful, but it is still not yet all there is to life. There is a certain direction which we should be trying to be heading towards, and inspiration alone will not get us there. The point of the inspiration is to get us to believe the words we are hearing on a very simple level, to just hear them as they are. Superficiality – and even inspiration, which can also be superficial – cheapens the worth of the words we hear.

Reb Pinchos Koritzer, a student of the Baal Shem Tov, would speak in a very low voice whenever he would lecture to the public, and it was hard for the people around him to hear what he was saying. When people would come eagerly closer so they could listen to hear his words, he would say that this was not commendable. Why? He explained that if a person is supposed to hear something, he will hear it wherever he is, and if he’s not supposed to hear it, then even if he stands very close within earshot, he will not absorb what is being said anyway.

In order for a person to hear the truth in what he hears, he has to approach it with *peshitus* (simplicity) and *temimus* (wholesomeness). The main point is not the words that one hears, but the simplicity that he can reach through them.

Better To Be Simple Than To Be Cunning

The Serpent was the first in history to deviate from *temimus* and to act cunning with its cleverness; it represents the root of *armimus*, “cleverness”, which is the opposite of *temimus*. Although we find a holy kind of being clever (*pikchus*), we must know when we should use our power to be clever and when not to. Even when we have to act cunning, we must still always remember that our soul by essence, according to how Hashem created us, is to act with *temimus*.

Temimus is actually the innermost point of our soul. If we have to act cunning ever, we should look at it as a “garment” which we need to put on sometimes, but not that it is our essence. Our essence has to be what is written, “*You shall be wholehearted with Hashem your G-d.*”

The more a person is a *tamim* (wholesome), the more he is “*with Hashem*.”⁶ The further he is away from *temimus*, the further he is from Hashem. In order for a person to really reach closeness to Hashem, he has to remove his analytical thinking a bit and just have a very simple attitude towards Hashem.

It is written, “*G-d made man upright (yoshor), but they seek many calculations (cheshbonos rabim)*.”⁷ By nature, Hashem made us to be “*yoshor*” - to be very “straight” and simple, rather than to be sharp, clever and cunning.

Korach was called a “*pikach*”, a “clever” person. Yet, his very cleverness brought him to sin. If only he would have had *temimus* and to accept that Moshe Rabbeinu is the prophet that Hashem chose, he never would have come to sin.

If a person remains with his *cheshbonos rabim*, he is far from being *yoshor*. The Baal Shem Tov said that even after all the comprehension he merited, his main task was to just reflect the possuk, “*And a righteous person lives by his faith.*”

The Gemara⁸ says, “Why do we blow *shofar* on *Rosh Hashanah*? Because the Merciful One said we should blow!” In other words, the only thought we need to calculate before we do something is: what does Hashem want from me here?

We don’t need to know the reasons why we do something; we don’t need to make *cheshbonos* (calculations). What we need is one *cheshbon* alone – “*What Hashem, your G-d, asks of you.*” That is the only *cheshbon* we should be making.

Bargaining Ruins Our Temimus/Simple Earnestness

Hashem gave us the ability of *pilpul* (sharp, analytical thinking when we learn Gemara), but we need to only use it when we learn Torah, and not when it comes to how we deal with worldly matters.

Once the Kotzker Rebbe zt”l saw someone bargaining with a saleslady to give him a cheaper price for what he was buying. The Kotzker told him, “You are forgetting the words of the *Mishna*: Do not speak so much with a woman.”

Besides for the *mussar* that the Kotzker Rebbe gave this person, there is a deeper point contained here as well: the fact that he was bargaining with someone increases his ability of cleverness, and holds back his *temimus*. *Temimus* would be that he is accepting what the price is and not making this calculation and that calculation.

⁶ This was hinted to in the author’s introduction of the sefer.

⁷ *Koheles* 7: 29

⁸ *Rosh HaShanah* 16a

Of course, there are no rules when it comes to this. Our point here is that if the person was born with a natural ability to bargain with others – even when the price is a normal price, he still likes to bargain for a better price – then if he always goes like this, he is losing his *temimus*.

When a person lives with Hashem in his life – when he lives with Him with *temimus* – then when he hears the price of the item, he knows that this is the price which Hashem wants him to pay, and if Hashem would have wanted him to pay less, he would hear a lower price.

We have only given an example, but we must know that this concept applies to all of our life, and to each person. The more *temimus* a person has, the stronger his *emunah* is; he believes that everything which comes to him is not by chance, but very well planned by Hashem. He realizes that when he is purchasing an item in a store, he's not buying it from the storeowner, but from Hashem!

Small Lies That Ruin Temimus/Simple Earnestness

Let us give another example of *temimus*. Sometimes a person sees that two of his friends are fighting, so he tries to patch up the situation between them by lying to them about each other, that the other wants to make up; he relies on the words of Chazal, that “it is permitted to lie for the sake of peace.”

However, one must know that this advice of Chazal is very dangerous for a person to use if he hasn't purified himself well. The Baal Shem Tov said that only one who has never lied his entire life can use this allowance, but if someone lied even once, he is not allowed to lie even for the sake of peace. He has already tainted himself by lying *shelo lishmah* (for ulterior motivations) and thus even when it comes to lie when it is *lishmah*, his *shelo lishmah* will be mixed in.

In other words, it's possible that a person feels that he is lying *lishmah*, but deep down in his soul, he has become used to being cunning with his lying; and he will fool himself that it's necessary sometimes to lie.

By having *emunah* in Hashem, a person will be much more successful than if he chooses the other way, which is to go with his own cleverness.

Temimus Is Our Essence

From a simple, superficial perspective, it seems that we are addressing just another aspect in our *Avodas Hashem* here – albeit an important one, something worth our attention; but that it is just one of the many other details we need to work on...

But if someone is already living in the inner world – or he as at least purified himself somewhat – he understands that *temimus* is what the soul is full of. Any form of lying goes against *temimus*. The more a person feels his inner world, the more he recoils from falsity and trickery, and he yearns instead for pure simplicity.

When a person doesn't feel his soul, it is very difficult for him to feel how falsity conceals his soul from him.

Bitachon

Before, we brought the possuk in Koheles, “*G-d made man upright, but they seek many calculations.*” The first thing a person is doing wrong by having *cheshbonos rabim* is that he is having “many” calculations, when instead he should only be having one goal in mind (which we will say). The second thing the person is doing wrong is the mere fact that he is making *cheshbonos*; he shouldn't be making *cheshbonos* in the first place.

We need to come out of our “*cheshbonos rabim*” we make and instead have no *cheshbonos*. By nature, a person is always thinking (more or less). There is constant worrying in a person's life. What is the solution to our worries? The answer is *Bitachon* – to trust in Hashem.

What is *Bitachon*? *Bitachon* is that a person sees that his livelihood won't come to him naturally, and so he must believe that everything is from Hashem; he will only get what he is supposed to get from Hashem, and there are no rules.

Usually, people only make use of *Bitachon* when they realize that they have no choice. The person is stuck, he sees no way out of his situation, so he has no choice other than to believe that his salvation will come from Hashem.

However, there is a deeper point about *Bitachon*: that a person *shouldn't think at all* about his situation. We do not mean to be lethargic, but rather, because the soul can be so connected to *temimus* that no thoughts at all about one's income even enter his mind. Of course, to live like this all the time is a very high level, but we have to at least try to get close to this.

Once the Brisker Rov told the Chazon Ish that he has *Bitachon*. The Chazon Ish told the people there escorting him, “When the Brisker Rov says he has *Bitachon*, it doesn't mean that he believes “everything will be for the best”. It means that he's not even *thinking* it will be a problem!”

How did he come to this level? When a person lives in *temimus* with the Creator, his soul is always fulfilling the possuk, “*And you shall be wholehearted with Hashem your G-d*”, and it will be hard for him to leave that state and think about *cheshbonos rabim*.

Someone who is always involved in his *cheshbonos rabim*, however, will see these words and think that they are all lofty, Heavenly matters. The reason for this is because he has entered so far into his *cheshbonos rabim* – *cheshbon* after *cheshbon* – and he has become so enmeshed in them that all his deeds are directed by them.

It is more important for a person to sit in solitude and reflect on the point of *temimus*, “*And you shall be wholehearted with Hashem your G-d*”, rather than placing so much effort on how he will make a living. This *avodah* differs with each person, depending on the level he is at. How much time should one spend on making a living and thinking about it, and how much time should one spend improving his *temimus* and *bitachon*? Each person needs a different amount of time for each of these areas.

However, there is no doubt that the main focus of a person should be on how much *temimus* to have, and not on how much effort he needs to have. Efforts to make a living are accomplished by our body, but our *soul* needs to be focused on the right place - connected with Hashem, through a yearning and a desire for Him.

Temimus Solves Self-Consciousness

Hashem created in a person a *middah* called *bushab*, shame. What is the root of feeling embarrassed? Before Adam sinned, Adam and Chavah “were not embarrassed” to be without garments. Only after the sin did shame enter them, and they immediately covered themselves with fig branches.

Why was there no shame before the sin? It is because shame gets created when a person thinks: “What are others thinking about me? What are they saying about me?” But when a person lives in *temimus* with the Creator, he never gets such thoughts. It’s not that he has elephant skin and that he’s insensitive to insults. It is just that his soul does not identify with such triviality.

“*And because of our sins, we were exiled from our land, and we were distanced from our earth, and we cannot ascend and appear before You.*” Our distance from the Creator got created through sin. It appears to a person as if Hashem is distant from him, and sometimes a person even gives up from ever attaining closeness to Him.

But we must know that the possuk says, “*For the matter is very close to you, it is in your mouth and heart to do it.*” If a person gets used to using “*your mouth*” all the time to talk about *emunah*, to talk about *temimus*, to talk about *peshitus* – he will be able to reach “*your heart*”, and from there he will be able to come “*to do it.*” But if a person all day is thinking about all kinds of clever thoughts that are superficial, it will be very hard for him to reach *temimus* and *emunah peshutah*.

May Hashem help us that we remove the *cheshbonos rabim* and instead live a life of *temimus* with the Creator.

1.12 | *Renewal To Our Prayer*

Renewal – Returning To The Root of the Soul

It is human nature to love new things.

However, the *possuk* tells us that “*There is nothing new under the sun.*”⁹ Chazal remark on this that only what is “underneath” the sun is never new, but above the sun, there are indeed new things. In other words, there are places which we find that have nothing new, and there are places that can have renewal.

Hashem “*renews in His goodness, every day, the act of Creation.*” Every second, Hashem is renewing the world, and a person’s soul is able to feel this. How indeed can we feel that universal renewal? Once a month, when we sanctify the moon, we mention how Hashem renews the lunar cycle every month. How can we say this, though, if the *possuk* tells us that there is nothing new under the sun? Isn’t the moon under the sun? The answer to this is that normally, when the moon is under the sun, it can’t be renewed, but when Hashem crowns it anew each month, it becomes new.

What does it mean that the moon is renewed? If you think about it, the moon never gets renewed, it just returns to the beginning of its cycle. This shows us that what we perceive as “new” is never really new, but just a *return* to the way things are supposed to be.

In other words, when a person renews himself, he is returning to the way things are supposed to be, to the root of his soul. In the original state of things, before the sin wreaked havoc on the fabric of Creation, there was only man in Gan Eden, attached to Hashem in complete intimacy, with nothing to come in between. That is our root, and it is our perfected state which we are trying to return to. Therefore, when we seek to make ourselves “new”, we need to understand that the meaning of “new” is not like how we normally understand it from the physical world we inhabit. Making ourselves “new” means that we are attempting to return to our original situation, to our soul’s root – to the perfected design of Creation.

Renewal of Prayer

One of the main tools which we are given to renew ourselves and return to our root is through *tefillah* (prayer). It is one of the three pillars which the world stands on, and it is a power we have to renew ourselves. Let us explain.

⁹ *Koheles 1: 9*

From a simple perspective, it seems that there is nothing new to the three *tefillos* which we *daven* every day. The *tefillos* were established by Chazal to *daven* every day, and it appears to us that yesterday's *tefillah* is the same exact as today's *tefillah*. From a simple, superficial perspective, there is nothing new to any of our *tefillos*.

Upon some thinking, however, there is a way how our *tefillos* can be new every day: when we add our own personal *bakashos* (requests) into our *tefillos*. If so, a person can add something new to his *tefillah* today that he didn't have yesterday in his *tefillah* – a new request.

Yet, if this is all we can do to make our *tefillos* new to us every day, then *tefillah* only renews people who indeed add in their own personal *bakashos* every day; but if someone just *davens* regularly every day without adding any of his own private *bakashos* to his *tefillos*, then he does not experience any renewal through his prayers.

Learning Torah, we all know, can have *chiddushim* (novel Torah insights), and we can always add onto the level of our understanding which we didn't have yesterday in Torah. So with learning Torah, we can all find renewal through it. But it seems that *tefillah* has no renewal to it unless someone has his personal *bakashos* every day.

If we reflect into this matter more, though, we can discover that *tefillah* can be a source of renewal even if we don't add our personal *bakashos*. How? If we get rid of our superficial notions of what “new” is and instead realize the inner meaning of “new”, we will be able to have a new *tefillah* every day!

The only reason why we don't feel that *tefillos* can be new every day is because we are obviously only having superficial renewal. If we would leave the superficial renewal and search for the inner renewal, we will find the renewal of *tefillah*, every day.

Chazal say that “there is no prayer which is like another.” The book *Nefesh HaChaim* explains this at length.¹⁰ Although we are all saying the same words every day, that's only the superficial layer of *tefillah*. The inner layer of *tefillah* is unique to each person. In fact, there is nothing more new than one's personal renewal of *Tefillah*, because when you take the same old thing and you give it your unique expression - *that* is a true novelty. We have the potential to find renewal through our *tefillos*, and we just need to connect to it.

“*New months You gave to Your nation, a time of atonement for all their offspring.*” *Rosh Chodesh*, the power of renewal, was given to us so we can be forgiven from sins; in other words, if we don't remove the sins that block us from our Creator, we cannot be renewed. Renewal, as we said, is for us to return to our root – utter closeness to Hashem, to simply be attached to Him. Renewal removes sin and draws us close to the Creator.

¹⁰ *Nefesh HaChaim, Gate III*

This shows us what the inner renewal of *tefillah* is. Every day, each individual *tefillah* we *daven* is about becoming close to Hashem – and this can be new each time, to each person. It is only the superficial layer of *tefillah*, the words we all say each day, that are never new. But the inner layer behind *tefillah* – our yearning to become close to Hashem – is a point that can be new and unique to every person.

Eighteen Separate Blessings, Or One Common Yearning?

Many people already feel this point we are saying, and they don't just *daven* superficially. They really *daven* with a feeling that each *tefillah* is a new *tefillah*. But there is still room to grow more, even after knowing this. It still might be just a form of inspiration (*hisorerus*) to a person. Inspiration alone isn't enough, because when a person just goes with inspiration, he will get enthused from one particular *possuk* or one particular blessing in *Shemoneh Esrei*, and this causes a problem. Let us explain what it is.

It is a wonderful thing to feel enthusiasm from our *davening*, and it's definitely better than just *davening* superficially without having any feeling to our *davening*. But we must know that the feeling of closeness to Hashem, which is the renewal that *tefillah* affords us, is a feeling that has to get stronger every day. This is the main effect that *tefillah* is supposed to renew us with, and the feelings of closeness to Hashem have to intensify with each *tefillah*.

In *Shemoneh Esrei*, there are 18 blessings, and 12 of them are requests. On one hand, this helps us become closer to Hashem, but on the other hand, we must be aware of something about this. When a person gets immersed in his concentration during, let's say, in the blessing of *Selach Lanu* (Forgive us) or in *Refoeinu* (Heal us), then he becomes self-absorbed! He becomes enmeshed in his physical needs. Although he is using his body's needs as a way to *daven* to Hashem, and there is some closeness to Hashem he reaches through this, still, in the end of the day the person is wrapped up in himself, in what he needs.

What is the *true* way to *daven*?

The soul in us wants closeness to Hashem, and in every *tefillah* we *daven*, in every blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, we need to find how what we are *davening* about is holding back *our closeness to Hashem* is we don't have it.

Thus, we are not just seeking to *daven* to simply fill our lacking situation, but rather *so that we can become closer to Hashem* through getting what we are missing. If we *daven* like this, the 18 blessings of *Shemoneh Esrei* will become full of life to us.

“Seeking desire separates.”¹¹ When a person davens the 18 blessings of *Shemoneh Esrei* as 18 “separate” requests that he has – he wants to do *teshuvah*, he wants to be forgiven for his sins, he wants to be healed, etc. – then each blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* to him stands by itself. This is not the true purpose of *Shemoneh Esrei*.

Only when a person connects to the inner layer of *tefillah* – to the renewal of *tefillah*, a result of strengthening one’s yearning for a connection with Hashem – does one’s *tefillah* then become alive.

“If Only A Person Would Pray The Entire Day”

One of the Sages said, “If only a person would pray a whole day.”¹² How would it even be possible for a person to *daven* the entire day?! Is *tefillah* all that there is to do? What about learning Torah and doing *chessed*??

Also, people are busy; how would it be possible for people to *daven* the entire day?? And what does it mean “if only” a person would daven the entire day – where do we ever find a Sage who talks like this?

The depth of this matter is that there are two kinds of *tefillah*. There is a kind of *tefillah* which we say verbally, or even mentally (these are really two separate categories as well, but for the purpose of our discussion, they are both under one group of *tefillah*). But there is another kind of *tefillah* which emanates from our soul itself – our deepest yearnings, hopes, and aspirations. This source of *tefillah* is rooted in our innermost desires. It is a *tefillah* which we sometimes aren’t even aware of consciously in our minds, and we definitely never come to verbalize it. It is our inner yearnings!

The statement “If only a person would pray the whole day” means that *tefillah* should be to a person as a yearning from within. This is not meant for a person to actually *daven* an entire day; rather, it means that a person should have this yearning all the time.

This yearning, the will in a person to want to connect to the Creator, is actually a kind of *tefillah* itself!

Anyone at his level can have this constant desire throughout the day – a desire to be close to Hashem. This is what the Sage meant in the words “if only” a person would *daven* all day.

¹¹ *Mishlei* 18: 1

¹² *Berachos* 21a

If a person is missing this inner point, he is missing the root of *tefillah*. Only if it can be said of him that all day he embodies the possuk “*And I am prayer*”, can the three *tefillos* established by Chazal look the way they should.

All Our Ruchniyus Is Based on Tefillah

During the day, our *Avodas Hashem* generally consists of two parts: our physical matters and needs, and our spiritual matters.

Our spiritual work must be connected to the goal of it all. When we learn Torah, *daven* or do *chessed*, it must be with the attitude of “If only” – that a person should have a yearning for closeness with Hashem. This feeling has to accompany one throughout the entire day.

Tefillah is the basis of any *avodah* we do. Rashi¹³ states that nothing can come without *tefillah*, such as rain, which we *daven* for in order to come. Besides for the general three *tefillos* of the day, a “*tefillah*” must always accompany one’s learning, or his *chessed*, or any *mitzvah* he does – an inner yearning for the Creator.

Since this yearning in a person isn’t so revealed out in the open, a person needs many reminders to awaken it. The book *Nefesh HaChaim* writes that even when one is in middle of learning, he is allowed to think for a second about Hashem and to feel a yearning for Him. Any *ruchniyus* that a person is involved in which isn’t accompanied by this yearning is missing the basis.

It is not practical for a person to immediately start having this feeling all day; like any other *avodah*, it must be worked on slowly and patiently. At first a person needs external reminders for it, and slowly but surely, the yearning will come from within his soul, until he eventually reaches a point in which his Torah learning and his *tefillah* are intertwined with each other.

Davening When You Go To The Doctor

Davening before you do anything certainly applies to all areas of our *ruchniyus*, but it also applies even when have to take care of physical matters.

For example, a person goes to the doctor when he doesn’t feel well; (Chazal indeed say that it is a *mitzvah* to go to the doctor, and that permission has been granted by Hashem to a doctor to heal patients). The doctor is in middle of checking him out. What is the patient thinking as he’s getting his examination? What are his thoughts?

¹³ *Beraishis* 2: 5

This situation is really an opportunity for growth in one's *Avodas Hashem*. Although a person naturally spaces out all the time, he is able to develop a will-power that his thoughts will remain focused on Hashem. Thus, before he gets his examination, he should set aside some time now and think what he is about to do.

He is talking to his doctor, and the doctor is examining him. At that moment, he should not forget that doctor receives permission from Hashem to heal, and that Hashem could heal him all by Himself if He wants. When going to the doctor, a person should always remember this, and never forget it: A doctor is only the messenger of Hashem. Thus, a person has to *daven* to Hashem that he be healed, and to remember that it's not up to the doctor.

Usually, after a person goes to the doctor, he just goes back to routine. But one must know that even going to the doctor is *Avodas Hashem* – there is a way how a Jew goes to the doctor, and the way how a Jew leaves the doctor. We only have given one example, but the point is that in whatever we do, we must never forget our yearning for Hashem.

When a person goes into the store to buy something and he's deciding between different items what to buy, he should also daven to Hashem, "Please help me buy what I need, and that it should be a good purchase." In this way, you take everything on this world and you connect it to the *Ribono shel olam*. (This is only true with buying things you need, not with unnecessary things).

When a person gets used to living like this – that through every step of his life, he is connected to Hashem and talks to Him, asking Him for help – he truly connects himself to Hashem.

"From the Narrow Straits, I Call Out To Hashem"

There is a well-known dispute if *tefillah* is a Torah-ordained commanded *mitzvah* every day, which is the opinion of the Rambam, or only in a time of distress, which is the opinion of the Ramban.

It is told of the Brisker Rov zt"l that whenever someone would mention to him something troubling, he would mumble a *tefillah*. He explained that according to the Ramban, there is a Torah-ordained *mitzvah* to *daven* whenever there is distress; if so, he is obligated in *tefillah* according to the Ramban whenever someone tells him something troubling, because it is like a time of distress.

According to the Brisker Rov, a distressful time is not necessarily when there is a war going on, nor is it limited to when something very troubling is going on either in a community or in an individual's life. The Brisker Rov viewed every problem as a time of distress.

There is a deeper point contained in this as well. It is written, “*From the narrow straits I call out to Hashem*”.¹⁴ The biggest “*meitzar*” (narrow strait) in history was *Mitzraim* (Egypt). In *Mitzraim*, it wasn’t just a physical slavery, but a spiritual slavery, because Hashem has not yet revealed Himself until the actual redemption from Egypt, when it then became finally clear. Only after final plague, the plague of the first born, did Pharaoh realize the meaning of “I am Hashem.”

In a person’s own soul, it’s possible that does not yet either realize “*I am Hashem*.” As long as a person doesn’t feel that Hashem is in front of him – “face to face Hashem spoke with them” – he is to some degree in his own personal Egypt, and he is confined to that *meitzar*.

Therefore, a person is always in a situation in which he must *daven*, because there is always a “time of distress” taking place. Not only are there physical dangers we go through, but our very soul is constantly in a state of danger and distress – the fact that one’s soul is far from the Creator. But if a person doesn’t feel that he is in a spiritual *meitzar*/confine, Hashem has no choice but to *chas v’shalom* send him physical reminders that will awaken him to realize that the true *meitzar* is for one to lack closeness with Hashem.

When a person realizes that he is in a true *meitzar*, he can then feel as the Jewish people did when they were in Egypt, and he will then be able to cry out to Hashem to redeem him from this personal exile. Then, just like Hashem heard the cries in Egypt and redeemed the Jewish people as a whole, so can Hashem hear our own cries when we realize the *meitzar* we are in – and take us out.

This can be achieved when we merit to reveal the reality of Hashem in our heart.

¹⁴ *Tehillim* 118: 5

1.13 | *Beginning To Act Lishmah*

“Die Before You Die”

Every single person on this world has a set amount of time for how much he will live on this world, predetermined by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. It is written, “*Our years are seventy, and for those who are strong, eighty years.*” When our time comes to leave this world, the soul departs from this physical world; if a person merits, he enters the World To Come, a world that is supreme bliss. It is a world unlike anything we know of from this world’s lifetime. It is the world which we all look forward to when the time comes for our soul to leave our body.

However, Chazal say that not everyone experiences death in the same way. The more one connected with his soul on this world, the easier it will be to take leave of the body by death. The more one was connected to his body on this world, the more painful it will be to separate from the body when the time comes.

What can a person do to avoid this most painful transition? In *Shaarei Teshuvah*, Rabbeinu Yonah brings the advice from Chazal: “Do you wish not to die? Then die before you die!”

This does not mean, of course, that one should make himself die in the simple sense. We can ‘die’ in the sense that *Avodas Hashem* is to leave this world and enter into a different kind of world. *Avodas Hashem* is not just about improving our various deeds, words, and thoughts. It is about leaving this world of materialism and instead entering into a spiritual world, a world of connection with Hashem.

In other words, it is not enough for us to grow spiritually and to attain high levels. We need to aspire to want to leave the lifestyle of the physical world. It is for our thoughts and yearnings to be connected to the *Ribono shel Olam*.

Shlomo HaMelech says the famous words in Koheles: “*Futility of futilities, so says Koheles; futility of futilities, everything is futility.*” When a person truly merits to understand this – not out of a sense of lowliness, but rather out of a sense that our purpose in life can be uplifted to recognize what true G-dliness is – then his soul becomes connected to the spiritual, and to that is all he aspires for.

We mentioned before many ways how to serve Hashem, but we must bear in mind the point that unifies all of these ways together: that spirituality is a world unto itself, and it is not the same kind of world which we see with our physical eyes.

“All your actions shall be for the sake of Heaven”

We will now speak about a point which we only mentioned briefly before, and now we will expand upon this point and understand it. The goal of this is not just always think about this point wherever we go, but to live them.

Chazal state¹⁵, “And all your actions shall be for the sake of Heaven.” The true way that a Jew’s life is supposed to look like is to always act for the sake of Heaven. There is no Jewish soul who doesn’t know how to act for the sake of Heaven, and the same is true for the opposite: there is no person who acts entirely for the sake of Heaven. After all, we are made up of materialism, and we have evil inclinations; each to his own.

Our *avodah* is to expand the part in ourselves that acts for the sake of Heaven – both in its quality, and in its frequency, until one eventually does all his actions for this pure motive.

Of course, in our subconscious, there will always be some thoughts which are for ulterior motives. But one has to aspire, in spite of this, that his actions become closer more and more to acting for the sake of Heaven. He should get to a point in which his ulterior motivations pale in comparison to how much he’s acting for the sake of Heaven, that the main part of his life is spent on deeds and thoughts which are for the sake of Heaven.

The various actions we do throughout the day seem to each have their separate purpose, but that’s only concerning the external part of the actions. The inner purpose of every action we do can all be for one purpose alone. On a deeper note, our actions don’t have anything to do with us, because our whole *avodah* is to improve our heart, and then Hashem improves our actions as an automatic result; this is what is written, *“To a man belongs the arrangements of his heart, and from Hashem will come the answer.”*

What is work with our heart that we must do, this “arranging of the heart” (*“maarchei lev”*) that the *possuk* is referring to? It is our power to act for the sake of Heaven. When a person lives a truthful kind of life, he realizes how he’s only a messenger of Hashem, because everything is meant to carry out His will. We each have own individual tasks to carry out for Him, but we are still all just His messengers. “A messenger acts upon the knowledge of his master.”

The only thing we can really get out of this physical world is to simply recognize that all of our life is meant only for one purpose: to do the will of the Creator.

Why? Because Hashem has asked us to do so! Even if a person never understands why it must be this way, what the understanding of this is, what the reason for it is – he still must carry out his mission, simply because it is the will of Hashem. We must do Hashem’s will - without asking any questions about this.

¹⁵ Avos 2: 12

“I believed, for I spoke”

This concept (to act for the sake of Heaven) is well-known, but the question is: How do we live by them? How can we draw this matter closer to our hearts?

For this, let us repeat the fundamental which we always mention, something that can be applied to every situation. It is written, *“I believed, for I spoke.”* If we ever want to work to acquire a matter, besides for realizing how important a matter is, we always need to speak them out verbally, so that we can get the matter to enter into our heart and penetrate it.

If a person really wants to live a life in which he acts for the sake of Heaven, it is not enough just to know about this concept intellectually, nor is it enough to recognize the importance of it. In order to live by it in our souls, we must constantly verbalize this matter: that we want to act all our life for the sake of Heaven. The more a person talks about matters that have to do with becoming closer to Hashem, accompanied by a prayer to Hashem about this – the closer a person will be to reaching a life in which he always acts for the sake of Heaven.

Of course, this does not happen in a day or two. But a person is still able to progress with this and it won't even take that long, in which acting for the sake of Heaven begins to take up a big place in his heart.

Anyone who is used to this can attest that it transforms him entirely. Verbalization of a matter doesn't just affect us to act more for the sake of Heaven – it is a matter which helps a person in anything he wants to acquire, whether it is to have more emunah, to remember Hashem more, etc. – a person should always *verbalize* it that he wants to acquire the matter. Practicing this transforms a person's mundane world into a world of *“In the shadow of Your wings, take shelter.”*

It's possible for a person to live here on this physical world, with his body on the earth, doing whatever it has to take care of – yet his soul is bound up with the spiritual, connected to Hashem, because one's heart and thoughts can be in that place at the same time that his body is here on this earth.

“For the matter is very close to you, it is in your mouth and heart to do it.” How can a spiritual matter become close to us? It is when *“it is in your mouth and your heart.”* As long as our heart is in it, and when we are verbalizing it as well, we will come *“to do it.”*

The more we verbalize it, the closer we draw it into our heart, and then as time goes on, we will be able to see that this leads to bettering our actions. Our actions will then have our heart in them, a heart of yearning for the Creator – a heart with a will to give satisfaction to the Creator.

Example - Tefillin

We will give some examples how to make this practical, but there are really countless scenarios to how it can be applied.

Firstly, as we said, there has to be a simple recognition that we are just Hashem's creations, and that all of our life is about one matter alone: doing what He wants. Anything else other than this goal is just the tools to get there.

For example, a person is taking out his *tefillin* in the morning and about to don them. As he's holding them in his hand, he can say to Hashem (either verbally or mentally):

"Ribono shel olam, why am I about to wear this tefillin? It is because You commanded me to put them on. Ribono shel olam, I want to do Your will, and give You satisfaction; but I feel that my will for this isn't so strong. It is hard for me to feel that I'm doing this just to give You satisfaction. I beg of You to help me, that the action which I am doing here should be done with purity of heart, with yearnings to carry out Your will."

A person doesn't have to use these exact words. Each person can use his own self-expression in how he talks to Hashem. The point of it is to absorb this as a way of life. Saying the "*L'sheim yichud*" prayer that's printed in the *siddur* won't suffice for this, because we are used to such prayers, and we often say them rushed and without any contemplation. Our words to Hashem must come forth from our heart – each according to his own language.

If someone just reads off the words of this prayer we've given, exactly as it's written here, then it's almost pointless! Each person has his own way of self-expression, and he must express himself to Hashem in his unique way. It is just that we all have one common denominator: We must not do any of the *mitzvos* without contemplation beforehand. Our good deeds need to be preceded with some thought.

Of course, a person will still fulfill the *mitzvah* of *tefillin* even if he doesn't say a prayer beforehand to Hashem. But if one really wants to connect to Hashem, he must put on *tefillin* slowly, with his heart in it, and not just with his hands.

It's a possible that a person was wearing *tefillin* all his life, fulfilling the *mitzvah* always – and indeed he will receive reward for it – yet he can still be lacking the soul behind the *mitzvah*, and he has totally lost out on the goal of *tefillin*, *chas v'shalom*. We have to get used to putting on *tefillin* with thought beforehand, and to awaken our yearnings before we put it on, that we are doing this to do the will of Hashem.

Let us once again emphasize, as always, that we need to remember to speak with Hashem in first-person, and not in third-person. "*Face to face Hashem spoke with them at the mountain, amidst a fire.*" Our aspiration is that we long to return to how we were at Sinai, when we were face to face with Hashem. Standing at Sinai is an event that we can actually reach through our soul, but it is

initially covered over by many layers and hidden from us. When one speaks to Hashem in first-person, “face to face”, he awakens his inner state of being at Sinai.

The more he speaks like this with Hashem, the more he ignites his soul to get past all the outer layers covering it (whether these outer layers developed from his last lifetime or from his current lifetime).

The Basis of the Day

We have given so far one example of how one should begin his day, but understandably, this is just the beginning.

We can give another example. A person finishes *davening*, and then he’s off to his respective job of the day. Right before he leaves *shul*, he should stop for a moment and talk with Hashem, simply, as follows:

“Ribono shel olam, a whole day is before me, a day which You gave me in order to serve You. I want to give You a nachas ruach (satisfaction), but it is hard for me. I sometimes succeed with this, and I sometimes fail. I am begging You to help me always remember that I must always do Your will, and that this thought should never leave me, from morning until night. (Of course, all people still forget this, but the more we daven like this, the less we will forget). Help me not only that I shouldn’t forget You, but that my soul should become filled with yearnings to do Your will, throughout the entire day.”

In other words, the beginning of our day should start out with a prayer to Hashem that He help us remember Him at all times to want to do His will.

If our day is based upon this, we can then proceed further with this. One who has purified himself more (and with time, anyone can attain this) should train himself that as soon as he gets up from his sleep, the moment his head feels clear, he should right away begin the day with this first thought: *“Ribono shel olam, You woke me up. You gave me another day to serve You. I beg of You that I not forget You, that I always remember every moment that I am only here to serve You. Please open up my heart as well to yearn to do Your will and to give You satisfaction.”*

The book *Nefesh HaChaim* writes that the first thought one has in the day is the thought that accompanies him throughout the rest of the day. If our first thought of the day is about a yearning for serving the Creator, it will remain inside us for the rest of the day and escort us constantly.

Although these matters are quite simple to understand, the evil inclination tries very hard to make us take our mind off this and forget about this. The more a person gets accustomed to the

avodah here, however, he will not despair, even if he forgets hundreds of times about this matter. He will begin fresh each time.

As the day goes on and a person realizes that he has forgotten about this matter, and now he remembers it, he should say to Hashem: “*Ribono shel olam*, I have forgotten about You. I forgot that I must serve You. I will not let myself become upset about this; I will strengthen myself again and continue to try. I beg of You to help me remember You always, that You help me avoid forgetting this.”

This is a gradual process. When we start practicing this, it is impossible to always remember Hashem throughout the day. But for at least five or ten times a day, we can talk like this to Hashem, and then slowly we should increase these exercises until we get to a point in which we are either always learning Torah, or thinking about serving Hashem.

All of our actions – whether it’s learning Torah, *davening* or doing kindness – must be done with remembering Hashem, remembering that we are acting to do His will. It should be from an inner recognition that we are living for Hashem.

To Please Our Father

To draw this matter closer to us, we will try to bring out how important it is to do the *mitzvos* with pure intentions.

Normally, we are supposed to begin with *shelo lishmah* (ulterior motivations) and only after that work to have *lishmah* (pure motives for the sake of Heaven). So why are we focusing here so much on *lishmah*, when we are only describing the beginning stage of our *avodah*? It is because we need to at least recognize at the start of the importance of *lishmah*, and how pathetic it is to act *shelo lishmah*.

Let us imagine the following scenario from life, to help us identify more with why we always need *lishmah*. Let’s say there is a father who has a fifteen-year old son who learns in yeshiva, *Baruch Hashem*. It’s *bein hazemanim* and his son is home for a few weeks. The family sits down to eat breakfast, and the father asks his son to please get him a cup of water. The son thinks for a moment and says, “Okay, I’ll get the cup of water...but what will you give me for it?”

The father is bewildered: “Did I ask of you so much?! All I asked for was a cup of water!”

Imagine such a relationship: the son only does favors for his father if he’ll get rewarded for it?? The son is only willing to get his father a cup of water only if he’ll get something in return? For getting him a measly cup of water?

The lesson we see from this is clear. We are all children of Hashem – “*You are children to Hashem your G-d.*” Hashem is our Father, and we are His children. If a person only acts *shelo lishmah* – he lives his life only for what he will get from Hashem – he is acting exactly like the selfish son in the above example. Sure, he’ll do the *mitzvos*, but only if he gets something out of it, such as long life or other blessings. He’ll always give *maaser*, but only because he heard that it’s a *segulah* to live a long life...

We do not mean to invalidate the fact that keeping the *mitzvos* causes certain blessing for a person. Yes, it is true that there are rewards for the *mitzvos*, and there is such a thing as *segulos*. These things are written about in the Torah. But it isn’t written in the Torah to serve Hashem in that way! A person who only serves Hashem only with a “what’s in it for me” attitude loses a simple father-son bond with Hashem.

Imagine the father in the above scenario we brought. For how long can he take this attitude from his son? How much pain he’s feeling: “I raised this child, for fifteen years I took care of him – and this is how he treats me??”

Why indeed would the son hesitate to bring his father the cup of water and demand a reward for it? It can only be for one reason alone: everything he does is all about himself.

Davening to Hashem To Remove The Ulterior Motives

The above mentioned example doesn’t apply to all people, but if someone wants to awaken himself to act more *lishmah*, he should think about the example we gave. He should reflect about this before he does any of the *mitzvos*.

For example, before one puts on his *tefillin*, he should say to Hashem: “*Ribono shel olam*, I am ready to put on *tefillin*. Why am I doing this? Because You requested this of me.”

Now, let out your true feelings: “*Ribono shel olam...what will You give me for putting on tefillin...?*” Then, immediately continue: “I am ashamed to say this to You (to ask You for reward) but this is how I feel.”

This is the honest approach; to leave this point out would be fooling oneself, and it would just be pushing our real thoughts underneath the carpet. It is much better to be honest with ourselves and admit to Hashem that we want reward for the *mitzvos* we do, rather than to lie to ourselves and fool ourselves that we have pure motives.

We need to speak about this with Hashem and say, “I know that these thoughts are really lowly, and that if I would have a son who acts this way toward me, I would find it unbearable. *Ribono shel olam*, I beg of You, purify my heart, and remove the impure motives in me that are holding me back from wanting to do Your will.”

By speaking it out with Hashem about our problem with *shelo lishmah*, we actually prepare ourselves to reach *lishmah*.

Daven to Hashem specifically about this: “Please, Hashem, remove from me these thoughts. I know they are not good, but it is hard for me not to think this way.”

Get used to speaking to Hashem as if you are talking to a friend – even more than how you talk to a friend. With a friend, you’re embarrassed to tell him certain things, but with Hashem, you can tell him everything. Tell Him all your thoughts; include Him in everything.

To summarize, we must *daven* to Hashem about two kinds of thoughts we have. We must *daven* to Hashem that He help us never forget our positive thoughts of acting to do His will, and we must *daven* to Hashem to remove from us all thoughts that are not about acting to do His will.

It is not enough to “do” these acts for the sake of doing Hashem’s will. If a person only ‘acts’ for the sake of Heaven – without speaking to Hashem about help with this – then it’s possible that he might serve Hashem his whole life, yet he still lives his life apart from Hashem!

This is an *avodah* which needs to be done with careful thought. If a person runs to *davening* in the morning and he comes five minutes late, and he quickly gets his *tefillin* on and just rattles off the morning blessings (usually he’s skipping some of *Pesukei D’Zimrah*, thinking that he’ll make it up after *davening*...) then it’s hard to really progress in such a way.

This point is clear. Every person has to get up on time; each person gets up at a different time, but all people have to be on time for *davening*, and “on time” means to come a little before *davening* starts. We do not have to prepare a whole hour before *davening*, like the pious ones of the previous generations; we are not on that level. But we must all make at least the minimal preparations for *davening*: that we will have the time to be able to think about that we are going to put on *tefillin* and *daven* to the Creator.

When a person has to rush to *davening*, he is missing *menuchas hanefesh* (serenity), and it will be very difficult for him to have any spiritual attainments. Rushing is one of the biggest deterrents to our *Avodas Hashem*. Whatever we are saying here involves reflection and pouring out our heart with Hashem, and it cannot happen in a rushed manner.

When a person merits to speak words of faith in the Creator, words of love toward Him, words about *lishmah* – he will merit to become closer to the Creator, and he will be connected with Him and attached with Him.

1.14 | *Reviewing The Basic Goal*

An Inner Point That Unifies Every Detail

We have so far merited from Hashem to discuss many different important points about our *Avodas Hashem*. However, we must be aware with all of this that in everything we learn about, there are always two layers, an external layer and an internal layer.

The *sefarim hakedoshim* tell us that there is always one underlying point behind every matter. What we see as many various details in a matter is only the external layer of a matter. The inner layer of a matter is always one point, and it a point which unifies all of the details into one unit. This one underlying point in everything is always one fact: that Hashem's glory fills the entire world. "You exist before the world was created, and You exist after the world was created."¹⁶

Hashem is everywhere, and He is contained in everything. He is the inner core of everything in Creation, of every place, of every time, of every soul. The soul is called a "*cheilek eloka mimaal*", a "portion of G-d from above", because Hashem resides in the core of our soul.

When we only have a simple, superficial perspective on things, then we see many random details in front of us. We see different places, different times, different souls –all we see is differences, and we don't see anything unifying all information together.

But when a person finally merits to transcend the superficial perspective of what he's seeing, he leaves that mentality of separation ("*alma d'piruda*", "world of separation") and enters into an inner outlook on things, an outlook that gives a unified perspective on things. It is the viewpoint from the deepest part of our soul - a viewpoint that sees how all details are unified, because all of the details we know of are really filled with Hashem's glory.

You Can't Tire From The Purpose of Life

We can give a moshol to explain what we mean, and with the help of Hashem, we can then try to understand that inner point well.

Let's say a person owns a store, and he sells all kinds of products: bread, milk, etc. If it's a big supermarket, he has hundreds of items he sells in his store. If we ask him why he has a store, he will not answer that it's because he has to sell this item and that item. It is for one reason alone: so he can make money!

¹⁶ *Tefillas Shacharis*

A customer walking through the aisles of the store, however, just sees many various items, and he doesn't think about how all of the items in the store are all about this one thing. He's thinking about this item and that item; he isn't thinking about how all of these items serve one purpose alone.

Let us explain these different perspectives, and what we can learn from this.

We can compare the customer's viewpoint to a superficial perspective on life: seeing many details, without seeing how all of the details connect. If the storeowner doesn't know why he owns his store, then what will happen? He will order all kinds of items to sell, even items that won't even sell so much, because he's caught up in details. He's forgetting the purpose of why he sells all these items in his store. Instead of trying to make money in the sensible way, he focuses on various items, not on the store as a whole; and this is a very silly way to run his business.

When it comes to worldly matters, we can all understand right away that the above attitude is erroneous, and it will not amount to any success. But when it comes to our *Avodas Hashem*, we don't find the above lesson to be that simple, and we find ourselves getting caught up in the various details we need to work on, forgetting the unified purpose of all those details.

Let's return to the above parable, of the store. Let's say we can go ask the storeowner: "Don't you ever get sick of working in your store all day? What do you care if you have this store or not?" He will probably be baffled at such a question. He will respond, "I don't understand your question. I am trying to make money here! That is why I have my store!"

"But don't you ever get tired of making money? What do you need it for?"

He will probably ignore such a question and think to himself, "I don't know what this person wants from me." Why? Because the storeowner lives his whole life for money. Money is his goal in life, so all he thinks about, naturally, is money. In his mind, he can never get sick of making money, because he thinks that money is the goal of life, that money is the thing that he needs to make him happy. Maybe he goes away on vacation sometimes and goes on a temporary hiatus from making money, but even when he goes away, he's still thinking about his business; he leaves on his cellphone so he can take any business-related calls.

The above storeowner has a constant goal in front of him: to make money. He doesn't stop thinking about making money – yet he never gets sick of this. He goes to sleep thinking about it, and he gets up in the morning thinking about it: "How much money did I make today? How much money will I make tomorrow?"

If we understand the lesson from the above *moshol*, we can get a very clear picture about our life. We all know that the purpose of our life, and the purpose of the entire Creation, is one reason alone: to become close to Hashem. If only we could think about our purpose in life as much as a businessman thinks about making money! The goal of becoming close to Hashem has to become

our most important wish in life, the point that is the driving force behind every single thing that we do.

When our soul truly comes to the realization that the purpose of life is to become close to Hashem, we will discover that we don't ever tire of this, and we can hear about it all day without getting sick of this point. We wouldn't get sick of always hearing about it, because you can't get sick of something that your soul yearns so much for. It is a desire that comes from our very soul, not just some knowledge of our intellect.

If the desire to become close to Hashem remains in a person as just some intellectual knowledge to him, then of course, he would tire from hearing about it. Our brain would grow impatient from hearing the same thing over and over again.

But if a person merits to internalize what the goal of life is, then he automatically will realize that we have nothing else on this world other than seeking closeness to Hashem, and to him, life looks a lot different. It's a whole new picture. Just like worldly interests can consume a businessman's thoughts and he will never grow disgusted from thinking, how much more so is this true when it comes to our spiritual concerns, that we never grow tired from thinking about it.

If a person ever feels that we are repeating too much that we have to become close to Hashem, and even more so, if he just thinks that way – he's right. It's true – we keep repeating it! If the reader is connecting to these words and living by them, then he will find that he is ready to hear about these concepts even hundreds of times and never grow tired of it. If he doesn't connect with what we are saying here, then it just means he has to hear it again, because he obviously hasn't really understood what we are trying to convey here...

The Basic, Fundamental Point

As long as a person still feels that he isn't living by the words here, he will run away from this point all his life and look for some new idea; he will look into this detail and that detail, and the details are innumerable.

We can present here a lot of nice ideas and wise advice on how to work on all kinds of areas, but if a person misses the inner point of it all, he might *chas v'shalom* drown in the giant sea of all these details.

The inner point of the details we will learn about here is one point alone: that all of our life is meant to live with the *Ribono shel olam*. When we get up in the morning, we are supposed to think about Him; wherever we go, we go with Him, and to Him we return to at all times. If a person doesn't understand this, and he instead begins to work on any detail in his *Avodas*

Hashem other than this, he will just be involving himself in various details that bear no connection. He will go lost in all the details and he might stay like that forever, *chas v'shalom*.

Whatever we have said until now has all been leading up to a certain direction: the inner point of all of this – that we must seek to always become closer to Hashem. Although it seems that we have said many various details over here that we need to practice, really, they are all just like wrappings covering over the inner point of everything we are trying to convey here.

If the reader has been hearing these matters already for a few months and he hasn't seen a difference in how he relates with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, and he is the same now as he was before he learned this *sefer*, the reason for this is either one of two possibilities. Either he understands all of this but he's having trouble implementing these matters, or is he isn't clear about the understanding of these matters here.

It would be easier for us if we just continue on here and say more, and keep advancing. But if someone truly understands the inner point behind everything we've learned here, he realizes that the inner point contains everything he needs to know, and he won't even feel a need to continue this *sefer*. We don't mean that there is no other inner work that needs to be done over here. Rather, our intention is that all of our *avodah* can sprout forth from the understanding of the inner point, from truly grasping how important it is to become close to Hashem.

The Sage Hillel said, "If I am here, everyone is here; and if I am not here, who is here?"¹⁷ The commentators are perplexed at Hillel's statement. How could it be that Hillel, who was known for his humility, could make such a seemingly conceited statement? One of the famous answers to this is that Hillel was talking about the Shechinah. He was saying that if "I" – the true "I", who is Hashem, is here – in other words, when we reveal Hashem in our heart – then we can conquer all evil. But if we don't have Hashem revealed within, *chas v'shalom*, then there is no true "I" here, and we will have nothing.

Without revealing Hashem in our heart, even if we attempt to improve on many areas, such as to try and fix our *middos*, it will be very difficult to see any success from this.

Every person must therefore make the following clarification: to see if he's truly ready to connect to the matters here. Each person has the choice to search for the way that he wants to go in. This is actually an *avodah* that can take a few years! This is not an exaggeration. It can take a few years to clarify with oneself this very first, basic point.

There will probably be readers here who don't understand this, but we must be very honest and clear over here.

¹⁷ Sukkah 53a

When a person merits to feel that he is living with Hashem in his life, he won't give this feeling up for anything.

Siyata D'Shmaya (Heavenly Assistance) To Fight the Evil Inclination

There is a well-known statement in Chazal¹⁸, “the evil inclination gets stronger every day...and if not for Hashem helping, it would be impossible to overcome it.” In other words, Hashem gave us the power to fight evil, but He has informed us from the start that we cannot overcome evil without His help. He is telling us, “I created you, and I created as well the evil inclination. I have given you certain abilities, and I have also given the evil inclination certain abilities. I am letting you know that the power which I gave the evil inclination is stronger than what I have given you.”

Any able-minded person realizes this and immediately sinks into despair. If Hashem, the source of all strength, has informed us that He has given more strength to our evil inclination, then how are we to ever overcome it??

However, at the same time, Hashem is telling us “if not for Hashem helping, it would be impossible to overcome it.” In other words, Hashem is saying: “I have a way for you to overcome the evil inclination. What is that way? Connect to Me. I can do anything and help you.”

Simply, this statement of the Gemara is telling us that we can have *siyata d'shamaya*, heavenly assistance, which we can receive from above. But the deeper understanding of this Gemara is that Hashem helps us when we reveal Him in our heart. Our strength we can have to fight evil is not simply coming from ourselves. It is coming from Hashem, who resides in our heart, and we must reveal His existence in our heart in order for us to get help from Him.

We need to realize that it is not our own strength which can fight the evil inclination. The evil inclination is far mightier than our puny human strengths. Our strength can only be supplied by Hashem. When we recognize that, when we attribute all strength to Hashem, then we will gain Hashem's help – an unlimited strength to fight evil.

Let us be very clear about this. It is impossible to fight the evil inclination with our human abilities. “Hashem will fight for you your wars, and they will be silenced.” Even if a person isn't seeing total successes in his fight against the evil inclination, and he isn't meriting how “they will be silenced,” he can still have the main part of the fight, which is “Hashem will fight for you your wars.”

When a person makes sure to include Hashem in every aspect of his life, Hashem will become his partner as well to help him fight his battles. But if, *chas v'shalom*, a person is apart from

¹⁸ *Sukkah 52a*

Hashem, he has severed the partnership, and he will be left all alone to fight the evil inclination – an impossible match.

Three Levels of Recognition

There are people who have reached the understanding that the purpose of life is to become close to Hashem, yet this remains by them as a mere intellectual kind of knowledge and nothing more than that. They know of it, and they are clear about it, without a shadow of a doubt about it. Yet, their heart is feeling differently.

First of all, they feel a pull towards evil. Also – and this is a more inner kind of problem – they do not see the goal of our life to be everything; people feel that there are other things which we need to focus on as well besides for this. Although people can be perfectly aware in their minds that something isn't right about this, their feelings differ totally from their minds' knowledge.

Let us define three kinds of people.

There are people who merited to purify their hearts to the point that they feel clearly what the purpose of life is – to become close to Hashem. Such people will never tire of hearing the topics discussed in this *sefer*, even if they keep hearing it again and again. They enjoy hearing about these matters even if they don't hear a novelty. (It's like how we never tire of eating. We can eat the same food every day, yet never get sick of it, because our sense of taste renews the food each time.)

This is the perspective a person reaches when he feels, in his heart, that Hashem is the purpose of everything, and that all of our desires on this world (or at least most of them) should be about connecting more and more to Hashem. Such a person is more than happy to hear the topics that are being discussed here, because the words here are about the truth, and the inner truth in the person will be pulled toward the truths of the matters here. The words here are simple and true, and even if they are heard again and again with nothing new added, they still don't lose their effect – to someone who has uncovered these inner truths in his heart.

Yaakov Avinu is called *ish tam*, a “wholesome man” – he personified the quality of *temimus*/simplicity. When a person has *temimus*, he loves simplicity, and he will love to hear even about simple, well-known matters.

We can see this from the pure innocence of small children, who radiate *temimus*. We can tell them a story, and they want us to tell it over and over again to them, and they won't even mind if we tell them the same story hundreds of times. Children love to hear the same story, over and over again, even if they know it by heart with all its details. Why? It is because they have the quality called *temimus*, simplicity (it is also called “*peshitus*”), and simplicity is drawn after hearing the same old beloved topics.

When a person reaches, in his heart, this point of simplicity – he can hear about the same truths over and over again, and he never tires from it. This is tried and tested by anyone who has begun to enter inward. That is one kind of person (and this is the ideal level we should want to achieve).

There is another kind of person that can know about all these things in his head, but he doesn't feel them in his heart. Such a person needs special guidance in how to internalize a matter from his intellect into his heart.¹⁹

There is also a third kind of person, who does not even understand at all any of the words here. He does not understand what we are making such a big deal out of over here. He's thinking, "Very nice point; important. But I have to learn Torah, do the mitzvos, and work to improve my *middos* – and through that alone, I will get to my inner world."

Such a person has the choice to go back and review everything we have said here until now, from beginning until this point, and try to clarify them. He should *daven* to Hashem that he be directed to the truth. If he arrives at the understanding that the focus of our life is about becoming close to Hashem – good, because then he has advanced to become like the second kind of person we mentioned above.

But if a person after trying to clarify the matters of this *sefer* and *davening* about it still doesn't have that understanding, then he will gain almost nothing from this *sefer*. This is because we will be very repetitive about the inner point of all these matters, and although we will also mention other details besides for this, we will still keep reiterating the inner point: that we must become close to Hashem through all of this, and that we must simply live with Him in our life.

Of course, there are individuals who need to hear some other points, but this is the general point that is applicable to any person: We must begin to truly feel Hashem, and not just sometimes. Our whole route in life needs to be accompanied by this very simple feeling – that we are living life with Hashem.

"Taste and See That Hashem Is Good"

There is a story told over about Reb Aryeh Leib Malin zt"l that once a young boy asked him a certain question in learning, and when he told him the answer, the boy didn't understand. After many times of trying to explain the answer and being unsuccessful, Reb Malin zt"l told him the following: "I can explain it to you from all different kinds of angles until you understand it. But I

¹⁹ In *sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh Vol. V* (p.337), in a short piece called "The Way To Internalize Matters Of Our Mind Into Our Heart", the author gives two possible methods of how to internalize knowledge. One way is to simply verbalize a certain fact many times, again and again – even hundreds or thousands of times – until it finally gets absorbed in the person. If this does not work, one can either write the fact down or he can review it mentally, for hundreds of times, until it eventually absorbs.

can't give you my level of grasp." (He was not referring to sharpness or memory, but clear understanding).

Once, Rav Shimshon Pincus zt"l came to a yeshiva to speak, and in middle, he said the following: "I can talk and explain a lot, but believe me: If you would only know what it is to feel like when a person lives with Hashem in his life, you would run after it, after I explain to you how you can get there. You don't understand how much darkness you are in, what you are missing in life, and how far you are from the truth, from "*taste and see that Hashem is good.*"

He continued: "And you should also know that even if you would ask me how you can taste that feeling, I wouldn't be able to give it to you. Hashem did not give me the power to be able to give over what it tastes like – the taste of true d'veykus with Hashem."

Everyone has special times in which they feel themselves growing spiritually and enjoying this. However, people come to imagine that such elation is supposed to be every second, and that this is what it means to be close to Hashem all the time.

This is a mistake! Being close to Hashem is unlike anything you recognize from until now. A person can live all the time with closeness to Hashem, or chas v'shalom, the opposite. A person has to decide, with total conviction, with clarity, if he truly wants to let Hashem enter his heart.

This is the meaning of the term, "*Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*" – "In my heart, I will build a sanctuary." It is to truly live with Hashem. It is not merely about thinking about how Hashem is next to us, or to put the four-letter Name of Hashem in front of us all the time. These are superficial methods, as they does not define being close to Hashem. Being close to Hashem means that Hashem is found within one's heart.

We cannot really explain what it is to anyone who hasn't reached it yet. But what we can all do is to firmly believe that it is possible to attain, just as all the other *tzaddikim* in the past reached – and lived – closeness with Hashem.

Once Reb Moshe of Kobrin zt"l said that if lustful people would only know how enjoyable it is to be close to Hashem, they would give up that fake, physical pleasure for the real thing – an intimate closeness with Hashem, which is true pleasure.

In fact, all the various loves that people have on this world, besides for a love for Hashem, is fake love. People who don't have a love for Hashem haven't tasted what true love is.²⁰

20 Editor's Note: Of course, this is not to negate the love we are supposed to have to people, especially to those who are dearest to us, such as our families and friends. It appears that intention of the author is that once a person tastes love of Hashem, his own love will deepen, and his relationships will deepen as a result (see www.bilvavi.net/englishtranslations "Heart of the Jewish Woman"). As for having a like towards various worldly pleasures, it is clear that love for these things is just indulgence and cannot be considered love in the first place.

This is the way Hashem made the world; as long as a person remains outside the world of closeness with Hashem, he will never attain it - not even a tiny bit of that inner world.

The way to get our inward reality is through *emunah*. Part of *emunah* is to have faith in the many leaders throughout all the generations, faith in their students and in their students who came after them. With faith in our leaders, we can believe the words of the Chazon Ish who wrote that it's possible for a person at times to temporarily resemble an angel even as one stands on this physical earth, and that such a feeling cannot be expressed to anyone. This is the true feeling of being close to Hashem.

If a person believes in this, he will then be able to truly feel, in a very real way and not in his imagination, a simple feeling no that is no less that how one can feel a table or a chair: that there is a Creator of the world. If a person believes that there is such a feeling he can experience, and he decides to live his life for this goal, closeness to Hashem – he leaves this world of darkness, and enters into a world that is radiant.

If the reader is still doubtful at this point about the words here, then there is no proof we can bring to convince him otherwise. But one thing we can ask of him: For your own sake, and for the sake of the Jewish people, and for the sake of giving your Creator a satisfaction, cry to Hashem every day, hour after hour, and ask Him that he guide you to the truth.

If a person really begs Hashem for this, and if he really wants it, Hashem will surely help him get to the truth, that he be able to give a nachas ruach (satisfaction) to Hashem all his life.

PART 2

Developing Your *Ratzon/Willpower*

2.1 | *Your True Will*

Nothing Stands In The Way Of Your Inner Will – When You Reveal It

Anyone who lives a little bit with the truth - and who is found within it - will right away arrive at the recognition that there is really not much to do here on this physical world, *olam hazeh*. Life for everyone is a *galgal chozer* - a cycle of coming here to this physical world and then returning to the next world.

The only thing we really have on this physical life we are living is that we can have the time now to dedicate our soul for Hashem and use it for Him.

Besides for this, whatever we think we have is all being imagined. It's all fleeting. Anyone who has opened up his real sight at least a little can see that he has already lost any taste for anything on this world.

Even if a person does have some enjoyment from this world, it's only momentarily, because our soul inside us really considers this world to be worthless. The only satisfaction we feel in physical pleasures is coming from our body, which gets calmed when it tastes physical pleasure. But our soul doesn't enjoy anything on this world other than the times when we use our soul to search for Hashem. This is all that we truly have in life; the *Mesillas Yescharim* said that "besides for this, anything else that people think is 'good' is nothing but futile and worthless."

However, the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) works to make people forget this from their minds, and even when we remember it in our mind, it is nonexistent in our hearts. But the truth is that our soul only wants to do what Hashem wants. "*Retzoneinu laasos retzoncha*" – "It is our will to do Your will." Our soul has a *ratzon*/will for closeness to Hashem, to be attached to Hashem and to give a *nachas ruach* (satisfaction) to the Creator. This is the inner will of the soul.

But when the soul is concealed and hidden away, it isn't revealed (and thus it isn't accessed), so a person is left with his outer desires, which are many; each to his own.

Let's think about this. When we begin to try serving Hashem, why is it so hard? What is holding us back from growing? What is deterring us? The answer is clear: our soul is concealed from us, and thus the inner will of our soul is concealed with it. This is what is holding us back from all growth!

There is a famous expression of our Sages, "Nothing stands in the way of the will." What kind of will is this referring to? Can it be referring to our body's desires? This cannot be, because we can all see that many people want various things, yet they don't end up getting what they want.

“Nothing stands in the way of the will” must therefore mean that nothing gets in the way of our true will, our root will, our inner will. All the “*retzonos*” (desires) in our heart which are not a true *ratzon* to get close to Hashem are just called “*retzonos*” as a borrowed terminology, but they are not the real *retzonos*. They are just imaginary *ratzon*; they might feel to us like a *ratzon*, but they are lacking the depth of what a *ratzon* is. It is only a sliver of a *ratzon*. The only true *ratzon* which exists is the *ratzon* of which nothing stands in its way.

Olam hazeh is called “a world of exchanges” (*olam hatemuros*), and a “*galgal chozer*” – a revolving cycle. This applies to us in that all the various, external *retzonos* which people have are constantly exchanging. One day a person wants money, the next day he wants honor, and the next day he wants something else. The various *retzonos* that people have are constantly changing.

There is one kind of *ratzon*, however, of which we can say of it “*I am Hashem, and I do not change.*” This is the G-dly will in a person, the *ratzon* in a person to do Hashem’s will and become close to Him. Other *retzonos* we have conceal from us the true *ratzon* of a person, the *ratzon* of the soul.

When Shabbos is at its peak, (by *Mincha*) it is referred to as “*raava d’raavon*” – “desire of desires.” This is the most elevated time of the whole Shabbos, as is well-known. At the *tefillah* of *Mincha* on Shabbos, before the Torah is taken out of the ark, we say the possuk, “*And I pray to You, Hashem, at this desirable time (eis ratzon)*”, because it is the time of *raava d’raavon*. It is the time in which the ultimate *ratzon* is revealed, the innermost *ratzon*.

Moshe Rabbeinu has the same *gematria* (numerical value) as the word *ratzon*, and he left the world at the time of *raava d’raavon* – Shabbos *Mincha*; this is because through Moshe Rabbeinu, the true *ratzon* of every Jew was revealed.

As long as the inner *ratzon* of a Jew hasn’t yet been revealed, the other *retzonos* of a person (which are not the real *retzonos*, only imagined) are at work and they do not bring a person to the truth. Without revealing the *ratzon* of the soul, it cannot be applied the rule “Nothing stands in the way of the will”, because if the will isn’t a true will, then of course things can get in its way. For this reason, people do not achieve their goals, because things are getting in the way; they haven’t revealed their true *ratzon*, so many factors can oppose their “*retzonos*” and get in the way.

The task of a person is thus to reveal his inner *ratzon*. After it is revealed, only then will nothing get in his way. It is written, “*To man belongs the arrangements of his heart, and from Hashem will come the answer.*”²¹ First, a person needs to arrange what’s going on his heart so that he can reveal his true *ratzon*, and after that Hashem does the rest.

²¹ *Mishlei 16:1*

As long as the true *ratzon* of a person hasn't been revealed, there will definitely be things holding a person back from reaching closeness to Hashem. Only after one has uncovered his true *ratzon* will he arrive at the truth.

The Test To Uncover Your Ratzon

If you ask any person, “Do you want to be close to Hashem?” the answer will be most definitely “Yes.” But we can give a simple test to see if this is true.

Since we just explained that only the *ratzon* to get close to Hashem is the true *ratzon*, and that all other *retzonos* aren't genuine and they are just being fantasized, if so, the strongest *ratzon* of a person has to express itself in the desire for Hashem. So a person has to check himself out and see if this *ratzon* has already begun to become revealed a little, or not. How can a person do this?

If a person views his *ratzon* to become close to Hashem as the strongest *ratzon* that he knows of in himself, then it is a sign that he has begun to reveal it. But if it's just another *ratzon* on his list of other *retzonos* – or if it is less important than his other *retzonos* (*chas v'shalom*), it shows that he hasn't yet begun to reveal his inner *ratzon*, because he doesn't give it much priority. The *ratzon* to become close to Hashem is in a whole different league than the other *retzonos* – it doesn't even compare to the other *retzonos*. As long as a person doesn't feel that it is his strongest *ratzon*, it is concealed.

Revealing The Inner Ratzon - By Being Alone

“*And I pray to You, Hashem, at this desirable time.*” From the “desirable time” (*eis ratzon*) with the Creator, a person draws forth the ability to awaken his inner *ratzon*.

How do we awaken the inner *ratzon*? We can learn it from Moshe Rabbeinu and how he departed from this world.

It is written, “*And no man knows of his burial*”. No one knows where Moshe Rabbeinu is buried; there are many interpretations of this possuk, but the following explanation is relevant to our discussion: Since no one knows where Moshe Rabbeinu is buried, Moshe Rabbeinu is alone. If we would know where he is buried, we would be able to come to his *kever* and connect to him; visiting the grave is a form of having a connection to the deceased. But Moshe Rabbeinu's *kever* is unknown to anyone; after he departed, he has become alone.

We also know that Moshe left the world at the time of *Shabbos Mincha*, which is the time of “*raava d'raavon*” – the time in which it is revealed the innermost desire of a person. If we put these two facts together – the fact that Moshe is alone, and the fact that he left the world at the

time when the inner *ratzon* is revealed – we can see how we get to the true *ratzon*: by being “alone.”

Yaakov Avinu “fought alone” with the angel, but he was only temporarily alone; after the fight, he went back to civilization. But Moshe Rabbeinu, after he departed, remains alone – in other words, he has totally left any form of connection to this physical world. He was totally connected to the sublime, with not a trace of superficiality.

The words we are saying here are continuing what we have spoken earlier about an hour every day of daily reflection. In order for a person to awaken his inner *ratzon*, he has to be “alone”; as long as a person only knows of companionship with people and not with Hashem, he falls from his inner *ratzon* and connects only to superficiality, to various external *retzonos*.

If a person really wants to get to know who he is – where his soul is at – if he really desires Hashem, he must be “alone.” He has to acquire solitude of the soul in which he is alone with Hashem.

These words are not a *derasha*, and they are not ideas. Anyone who has begun to touch any real wisdom in life knows that this concept is a fundamental one in Creation, stemming from the root of Creation. (The root of Creation is called *keser*, “crown”, and it represents the inner *ratzon*; in order to awaken it, one must be “alone.”)

The Evil Inclination Cannot Defeat Your Inner Ratzon

Herein lies the root of succeeding in serving Hashem (and *chas v'shalom*, the other way around as well.) As long as a person has revealed his inner *ratzon*, nothing will get in his way. What is usually preventing people growing in their *ruchniyus* is because they have begun *Avodas Hashem* without ever having revealed beforehand if they have a true will to serve Hashem.

Of course, people always have some *ratzon* for Hashem, in any case; if a person wouldn't have any trace of *ratzon* to serve Hashem, then he never would be interested in *Avodas Hashem* in the first place. What we mean is that the *ratzon* of a person has to become like a “*raava d'raavon*” – a “desire of desires”, a very deep desire, and not just to remain a *mere* desire in you; otherwise, a person is missing the inner point of his *ratzon*.

One cannot proceed in *Avodas Hashem* and grow, if he's missing the root of *Avodas Hashem*. The question is, though, what exactly is the root that is causing this problem in us? We will explain this more in detail.

Every person has *retzonos*; in addition to this, we also have our *thoughts*. When a person hears that he needs to change and become more truthful – and he feels inspired to do so, since the inner *ratzon* within himself wants it – he immediately leaves the point of *ratzon* and instead gets

involved with his thoughts, thinking: “How can I get close to Hashem? What must I do? What are the ways to get there?”

What happens? The *thoughts* come and hold back the *ratzon*! He knows what he wants, and he even feels it – and then he wants to serve Him. But the *yetzer hora* is very strong, and he comes to a person with various thoughts, and convinces him otherwise, as Chazal say; we mentioned this earlier.

The advice to overcome this problem, the Ramchal said, is to have an hour every day of reflection. How does the Ramchal’s advice of daily reflection help against the *yetzer hora*? The answer is because the *yetzer hora* cannot destroy your inner *ratzon*. The *yetzer hora* can only defeat your *ratzon* when your *ratzon* isn’t yet real. But when you have a real *ratzon*, it is such a deep point in your soul that no evil can ever penetrate it, and even the *yetzer hora* can’t fight it.

As long as one’s *ratzon* is still only the lower *ratzon*, it’s the *ratzon* of the *yetzer hora* versus the *ratzon* of the *yetzer hatov*, and they are at war with each other. But when a person awakens his inner *ratzon* more and more, he has brought his soul to the fore, and the *yetzer hora* cannot overcome the *soul*. Evil can overcome your intellect, your feelings, your desires – but it cannot overcome your very soul. Your soul itself is stronger than even the *yetzer hora*.

Before a person reveals the inner *ratzon*, it is a difficult war with the *yetzer hora*, and the tests are very difficult. When a person awakens the innermost point of himself – his deepest *ratzon* – he has revealed a point which is above the *yetzer hora*’s reach, and the *yetzer hora* won’t be able to overcome his will. Thus, a person has two choices. Either he can go his whole life “fighting the *yetzer hora*”, trying his hardest to battle evil, using his weak *ratzon* in his arsenal...or he has another choice, the higher path to take: he can reveal in himself a power that is stronger than the *yetzer hora*.

Chazal (Sukkah 52a) state that the “evil inclination gets stronger every day, and if not for the help of Hashem, it would be impossible to overcome it.” What this means is that there is a deep point in the soul that is G-dly which cannot be defeated by the *yetzer hora*. Without revealing this point in the soul, a person is left to fight the *yetzer hora* with his mere physical strength, which of course will be pathetic to fight with. Even his more spiritual powers, such as his intellect, can also be overcome by the *yetzer hora*. But when a person awakens his inner *ratzon*, his spirituality will overcome all physical lure, just like how wind can blow away rain.

What a person has to work on, then, is to awaken his power of “*retzoneinu laasos retzoncha*” – “It is our will to do Your will.”

Davening To Reveal Your Inner Ratzon

How do we reach our inner will? How do we awaken our soul to want the truth?

Firstly, as we said earlier, we need an hour every day of reflection. During this time, we should then work to awaken our *ratzon*. The question is only *how* to do that. There will be two parts to this – we need to “do good” as well as “remove ourselves from evil.”

To “do good”, we need to awaken our true desire of closeness to Hashem, and to “remove ourselves from evil”, we need to get rid of our various external desires.

In order to awaken our deep power of “It is our will to do Your will” – the positive aspect here – someone who can reflect deeply with his mind will be able to do it when he reflects into it. But this can only be accomplished by certain rare individuals.

There is another way to do it, and it is the more truthful approach, which can be applied to all people. It is for one to talk to Hashem, and say:

“*Ribono shel olam*, You created me, and the purpose of creation is to become close to You. This is clear to me. It is also clear to me that the true desire of my soul is to become close to You; yet it is also clear to me that my heart doesn’t feel this way as of now. My heart wants this thing and that thing. I know that my will to become close to You is what I really want, and that all of my desires in comparison to this are not the real thing. Even though I am aware of this, I still want those externalities.

“*Ribono shel olam*, help me that I should truly want You, that I should actually feel that will to become close to You, that this *ratzon* of mine should not stay concealed from me. Let it become awakened. Don’t just awaken it – let this *ratzon* always be revealed! I am beseeching You that You help me truly want You.”

This is how a person should speak to Hashem – again and again, day after day, week after week, month after month. *Daven* just for this one point: “*Ribono shel olam*, I really want to feel the inner *ratzon* of my soul to become close to You. I know that I don’t feel this way, and I am begging You to remove from me the impurity on me that is holding me back from feeling my true *ratzon*.”

However, make sure that you don’t imagine that you already feel the inner *ratzon*. One has to be very aware of himself and know what he really wants, what level his heart is at; he has to be aware of his heart desires any externalities. One should not deny his human weaknesses; be aware of them, but at the same time, *daven* to Hashem that your true *ratzon* should become revealed.

Don’t think that this will come to you because you have reached a high level or because of your merits. Rather, *daven* to Hashem with one simple request: “You created me for a certain purpose, and this is Your will. Do this for Your sake, that I be able to serve You. I don’t have merits on my own; I am not worthy. But for this I ask: take me as I am and take care of me. Awaken in me a desire for You, for Your sake.”

If a person thinks that his inner *ratzon* will become revealed because of his merits or from reaching high levels, such thoughts are detrimental and they will actually distract him from getting to his inner *ratzon*, because he will just fall into his ego and have an internal kind of *gaavah* (arrogance).

A person has to come to Hashem like a simple Jew, as if he was born today anew, and ask Hashem, “You created me for a purpose. Please help me reach that purpose. It is true that I don’t always act properly, but just because of this I should be left back in my situation and never reach my goal, which is to become close to You?! I ask of You one thing – please merit me that I should have the true *ratzon* for You.”

These very words awaken the inner *ratzon*, and in addition to this – and this is the main point – by *davening* for it day after day, and week after week – Hashem will surely listen to the *tefillos*. A lot of patience is required for this, however. If someone wants to see overnight success, he will be very disappointed.

Knowing Our Direction In Life

A person has to understand the basic point: If one doesn’t have a *ratzon* for the Creator, *chas v’shalom*, and he doesn’t want to become close to Him – there is nothing to live for, and there will be nothing for him to do on this world! This is a world of fantasy. “*A generation goes and a generation comes, while the earth stays forever.*”²²

Even more so, what does a person take with him from this world? Some food, some sleep, some enjoyment here and there? We only remain with one thing from this world: the desire and yearning for Hashem, for the true closeness to have with Him. That is the single thing we can have from this world.

Chazal say that “At the time a person is about to die, he is not escorted by his silver, by his gold, by his jewels and diamonds, but by his Torah learning and mitzvos alone.”²³ Only Torah learning that was spent with attachment to Hashem, and mitzvos that were done with the recognition that the only true good thing on this world is closeness to Hashem, will escort a person into the next world, where a person will attain the innermost closeness.

If a person just lives thinking that *Avodas Hashem* is an important thing – even if he knows it’s very important – if he’s also looking to gratify his worldly desires, he has a big problem. A person in this situation needs to sit alone and beg Hashem that he be helped with this. During these

²² *Koheles 1: 4*

²³ *Avos 6: 9*

times of quiet, a person needs to beseech Hashem from the depths of his heart that all his various desires which aren't important should be removed.

This *avodah* can take days and even weeks. One part of it is for a person to feel that he must only have a *ratzon* for Hashem, and the other part of it is for a person to ask of Hashem, “*Ribono shel olam*, I know that my true will is to become close to You, but my heart doesn't feel it. Please do me a kindness and take away my untrue desires.”

A person has to really agree deep down that he doesn't want anything else besides this. For example, sometimes a person *davens* that he doesn't want *kavod* (honor), but deep down, he wishes that Hashem would grant him some more *kavod*...a person has to be very honest with himself, and *daven* many *tefillos* for this, and then Hashem will surely help him.

The basic point is that a person has to decide: I am ready to give up all worldly interests!

Such a decision will have to be carried out slowly, in steps, and not to work on too many changes at once. But a person has to clear what the central point of his life is, to which direction he is heading towards. We have only one point towards which we should be aiming, and that is *retzoinenu laasos retzoncha*, “It is our will to do Your will.” We need to remove all the “yeast in the sourdough” (a reference to the evil inclination) from us and remain with just one *ratzon* alone, a desire for Hashem.

If a person isn't prepared for the fact that at the end of his life he will only be left with this one *ratzon*, then he will be never able to grow in life. First **we have to really want it**, and only after achieving that recognition can we can *daven* to Hashem that He remove all our external desires and let us reveal our inner *ratzon*.

When a person keeps to this, and he *davens* to Hashem like this with all his heart and he doesn't give up, then without a doubt he will be answered, and he will merit that “we have only one heart, toward our Father in heaven.”

2.2 | *Opening Your Ratzon*

Ratzon Is A Constant Power

The word “*ratzon*” (will) has the same *gematria* (numerical value in Hebrew) as the word “*mekor*”, source. This shows that the “source” of all personal development is our *ratzon*.

Hashem created a person in a way that there is always some *ratzon* for something. Sometimes *ratzon* only lays dormant, and sometimes it is stronger and more clearly felt, but there is never a moment in which there is no *ratzon*. A person, every second, wants something. Even if we aren't aware of this consciously, it is taking place in our subconscious.

As long as we are human, we need *ratzon* to survive; if a person would live for one moment without any *ratzon*, he would perish from existence (and immediately become integrated with Hashem). *Ratzon* keeps our existence going.

Thus, before we explain how *ratzon* works, first we need to understand how necessary it is for our existence. *Ratzon* is the key to our inner world, and it keeps a person going every moment; to say it on an even deeper level, *ratzon* is the very essence of a person. If a person would be in a situation in which he has no *ratzon* – either because he has given up on everything, *chas v'shalom*, or even if he has totally nullified his *ratzon*, he would immediately die!

There is a *tefillah* that one says upon making a *siyum* of a *masechta* (tractate) of Gemara, which translates: “We toil and they toil; we toil and receive wages, while they toil and do not receive wages.” The question is, don't we see that even people who don't learn Torah also get paid for their work? (Although spiritual reward in the next world will be much greater than any reward found on this world, still, how we can say that those who don't toil in Torah never enjoy any wages on this world?)

The answer to this is that there is a big difference between physical exertion and spiritual exertion. In the physical world, we get paid for our work, but it's only according to how much we achieve, but not according to how much we try. If a carpenter is building a table for someone and the table breaks in between, he doesn't get paid for his hard work. But when it comes to spiritual work, “we toil and receive wages” – we get rewarded according to how much we toiled.

We learn from here a very deep and fundamental point. When it comes to our physical or worldly achievements, only the achievement is worth something, while the steps we take to get there have no value. But when it comes to spiritual work, not only is there a goal we are trying to achieve, but every step of the way until we get to our goal is a goal unto itself!

This is a very deep point. We can give an example how we see it.

Chazal²⁴ state that “If a person thought to do a mitzvah and then he was held back against his will to do the mitzvah, it is considered as if he did it.” The simple understanding of this is that it is considered as if he did the mitzvah, and that is true. But the deeper meaning of this is that because he had a *ratzon* to do it, that itself is an accomplishment. The fact that a person even wants to do the right thing is an accomplished goal - in and of itself.

Of course, a person must try to carry out his *ratzon* and come to act upon it, but we must also understand that having the *ratzon* itself is also an achievement.

The Purpose of An Unfulfilled Ratzon

To understand this better, we will quote the words of the Ramchal in one of his letters.

He asks: What was the purpose of all the decrees on *Yiddishkeit* throughout the generations? What was the point of the decrees that we shouldn't learn Torah? If it would have been made hard for us, then we can say that these decrees made us learn Torah with more *mesirus nefesh*.²⁵ But the decrees made it they couldn't learn at all, even with all their *mesirus nefesh*. Why did Hashem make it possible that we couldn't learn Torah at all? What did this do for the world?

To answer this question, the Ramchal writes a great fundamental: there are times in which the world is sustained just through our *ratzon* alone. The fact that we wanted to learn Torah, even though we couldn't – that yearning itself was purposeful, because the stronger yearnings purified the *ratzon*. That was an accomplishment for itself.

When a person has a *ratzon* to learn Torah, his *ratzon* is usually minimal. But if he's forced into a situation where he can't learn, his yearnings will get awakened, and now his *ratzon* will be far more ignited than before. It is precisely in these situations that a person has the opportunity to really develop his *ratzon*. This was why there were so many decrees on learning Torah throughout the generations, as the Ramchal writes – to awaken our *ratzon* more.

Maybe you will ask, “Nu, so their *ratzon* got stronger, but in the end they couldn't learn Torah!” But the answer to this, says the Ramchal, is that building the *ratzon* serves a purpose to itself. It is a necessary step in our growth – that one reveals his true *ratzon*.

Our people faced many tribulations throughout the generations, but it is not only the earlier generations who were given that opportunity to ignite their *ratzon*. Every person can do it as well.

A person has many *retzonos*; let us discuss the spiritual aspirations of a person. A person has many aspirations which he doesn't see getting fulfilled. If it's a very strong aspiration, and it's not

²⁴ *Berachos 6a*

²⁵ *self-sacrifice*

becoming actualized, a person naturally will have pain over this. He feels, “It’s so painful that I want this spiritual attainment so badly, and that it’s not happening.”

But we must understand, however, that Hashem planned this out. He gave us many such aspirations which we will never be able to actualize; there are *retzonos* that people have which they simply don’t have the energies to put them into action and carry them out.

Why do such *retzonos* exist? Their purpose to us is no less important than our actualized *retzonos*. Just to have these very *retzonos* serves a purpose, even when they don’t get fulfilled. The fact that a person wants something so badly and yearns for it – when it’s a spiritual aspiration – is an accomplishment in and of itself. It shows that he really wants spirituality.

Ratzon – The Basis of Everything We Want to Build

When it comes to materialistic pursuits, just wanting something has no value unless it happens. For example, a person has an idea to build a new house. After two years his friend meets him and asks, “Nu, what’s going on with the house?”

He replies, “I still want to build it, but I never get around to it yet....”

We would laugh at him; it’s very nice to want to do something, but you have to act upon it! A person can want and want, but his *ratzon* has no value unless he actualizes it. That’s the way it works when it comes to materialistic *retzonos*.

But when it comes to *ruchniyus*, though, it doesn’t work that way. Any *ratzon* of a Jew’s soul for something truthful, for some more closeness to Hashem, is the most precious thing there is. Even if the *ratzon* doesn’t end up getting actualized, and a person finds himself still very far from Hashem, feeling totally unsuccessful in actualizing his spiritual aspirations - the very fact that he has a *ratzon* for more *ruchniyus* is already a big accomplishment.

A person has to realize, though, that it is indeed his *avodah* for him to know that Hashem wants him to merely have a *ratzon*.

We do not mean, Heaven forbid, that one does not need to try to actualize his *retzonos* for *ruchniyus*. Obviously, our purpose is to keep the Torah and the mitzvos. What we are describing here is how one can build himself, and the very first thing that a person needs to build within himself is his *ratzon*.

That is the first, basic step. After that comes the next step, which is for a person to attempt to actualize his *ratzon*. For this, a person needs carefully planned thought; as it is written, “*With wisdom a house is built.*”

However, using our mind alone isn't enough; it has to be accompanied with pure, truthful desires for more growth in *ruchniyus*. Building our point of *ratzon* is the root of all roots to anything we attempt to develop. If the root is weak – in other words, if our *ratzon* isn't that strong (and the person is just acting *shelo lishmah*), then the foundation will be weak, and whatever we build upon it will not last.

How Important It Is To Have A Ratzon for Ruchniyus

The root of the issue here, though, is that a person naturally isn't used to building his power of *ratzon* at all. People initially prefer to behave in the exact opposite approach of what we are saying.

For example, when a person is money-hungry, his desire for money begins to burn within him. His lust for money - his *taavah* (desire) for it, is growing, but he never actually builds his *ratzon* (will) for the money. His *ratzon* is merely out of control. This is an example of an undeveloped *ratzon*. It resembles a thorn that grows by itself, which is not true growth, but rather something that's out of hand and undeveloped.

How did his *ratzon* for money enter him? He saw all kinds of things that triggered it. Maybe he saw a wealthy person and thought to himself, "Wow, this person is so happy and successful", and he imagined that he must have a lot of money in order to be happy. His desire for money got awakened due to various factors.

Now, have we ever heard of a person who thinks about his *ratzon* for money for three years, and to build up his *ratzon* for money? No one does that. People who want money run after money, and people who don't have a *ratzon* for money don't pursue it. But no one is building their *ratzon* for money.

Our natural orientation is that we don't need to develop our *ratzon*. When we want something, we naturally begin to think how we can get what we want – but when it comes to trying to build the *ratzon*, we do not see a need for this – even when it comes to materialistic *retzonos*.

Materialistic pursuits can get fulfilled even without building the *ratzon*. But acquiring *ruchniyus* doesn't work that way. With *ruchniyus*, our *ratzon* for *ruchniyus* itself won't amount to anything unless we work to build it and develop it. Just to have a *ratzon* or yearning for *ruchniyus* isn't anything, and we can't build anything in our *Avodas Hashem* upon our natural *ratzon*; we need to take our *retzonos* for *ruchniyus* and further develop them, in order for our *ratzon* to amount to anything.

We can all see that there are people who search to grow in their *ruchniyus*, and they really are full of aspirations to work on so many areas. You can have a person who sees a big nice sign in *shul* with the words "*Amen yehei sh'mei rabbah*", and he gets inspired to say "Amen" with a lot of

concentration; the next day he sees a sign about signing up for a *shemiras halashon* program, and he gets an awakening to improve on his *shemiras halashon*. Then come the signs about how we have to improve on *tzniyus*.

Every day, people are getting inspired to work on something else...one day a person has a *ratzon* to work on answering Amen properly, the next day his *ratzon* is to work on something else....

While it is true that these are clearly desires for holiness, and they stem from an earnest search for more *ruchniyus* in one's life, the problem with all this is that the person doesn't build and develop his *ratzon*. He is inspired and left with an indelible impression of what he wants to work on, but every day he wants to work on something else, and this hampers one's growth.

We can compare this to a person who tries to build an upper floor in his house before he builds the lower floors. Without the foundation, everything will crash.

We can't build our *ratzon* even from hearing lectures, from reading sefarim, or from other forms of inspiration. One has to figure out exactly what it is that he has to want, and he has to work for a long time until he discovers what it is. It might even take months to develop a true *ratzon* for one to decide that he will work on just one area that needs improvement. This has to be done before a person attempts to work on any area.

If someone is impatient by nature, he wants to see immediately results in his *ruchniyus*. He right away wants to know: “*Nu*, what should I do, *l'maaseh* (practically speaking)? Tell me what I have to do already!”

However, the *possuk* says, “*Those who plant with tears, reap with joy.*”²⁶ This is the process of *Avodas Hashem* – we first have to “plant with tears” by going through some difficulties, and only then can we “reap with joy” and enjoy results. But someone with an impatient nature has a problem in that he immediately wants to jump to the end of the *possuk*, to “reap with joy”, before he even does any “planting”/investing in his *Avodas Hashem*.

Not everything we hear in a lecture we are able to work on right away. Although the Ramban wrote in a letter that a person should try to actualize what he has learned as soon as he gets up from his *sefer*, not everyone can do this. It should definitely be an aspiration. But when we only know intellectually in our mind that we need to do work on something – or if we just believe in it – if we still don't feel that we really want to work to improve, then nothing will result from our *Avodas Hashem*.²⁷

²⁶ *Tehillim* 126: 5

²⁷ *Editor's Note: (The general plan of what we will need to do, as we will see, is to take our mind's knowledge that we need to improve (or to extend our belief that we need to improve) and to extend that knowledge/belief into really feeling that we want to improve (which will be explained later.)*

First, We Need To Really “Want”

There is another point we should know. As we said in the last chapter, a person has a *ratzon* every second for what is truthful. If a person would cease to have a *ratzon*, his whole existence would cease with him, and he would become integrated with Hashem. So, if we always have a *ratzon*, where is it?

Sometimes it is revealed out in the open, and sometimes it is hidden deep away in our soul. If we want to build our power of *ratzon*, we need to realize the concept of *ratzon* all the time; it has to become more revealed within our soul.

To do this, a person has to continuously want something truthful - and he has to want it every second.

At first, this can only happen slowly, because the beginning stage is for a person to clarify to himself more and more what his *ratzon* really is. But eventually, the *ratzon* has to always become alive in the person – a burning desire.

The *ratzon* of most people is usually hidden away for the most part of the day. If we meet a Jew in the street and we ask him, “What do you want right now?” he will respond, “What do I want in my life? Oh, I want this, and I want that...”

“No. I’m not asking what you want in life – I’m asking you what you want right now, at this very moment.”

“Oh”, the person will probably respond, surprised. “I don’t know exactly what I want right now. I’m too busy right now thinking about other things...”

There is no person who has never experienced a revelation of his true *ratzon* at times – both for good and for evil. When a person has an evil desire for something, or when he gets angry, he can see what he really wants. The same is true when it comes to good, like when one gets inspired from a good speech. But throughout the actual course of the day, people just act by rote, and a person’s *ratzon* is put to rest. A person “knows” what he has to do (at least, that’s what he thinks...) and he just lives his life knowing what he has to do.

If a person truly wants to build himself, he has to become a person who truly wants *ruchniyus*. He has to reach a point in which he can feel his *ratzon* for *ruchniyus* burning within him. When a person walks through the street, he should be experiencing yearnings for *ruchniyus*; and if he isn’t, he should at least want to want. There must be at least some small iota of *ratzon* going on at all times in a person!

As for the depth of the *ratzon* – how much it has become internalized in the person – that’s a different issue. But the first step is for a person to develop a simple point: I want that I should want to grow in *ruchniyus*.

Practical Guidance In How To Awaken Your Ratzon

How can a person actually awaken within himself the power to “want” to begin with that he should have a *ratzon*?

It is clear that the only *ratzon* which a person needs to have is to become close to Hashem. “And as for me, closeness to Hashem is good.” But before we figure out what we want, we first have to build up within ourselves the very concept that there is such a thing called *ratzon*.

This will require a full day’s work! Just doing *hisbodedus* alone that we spoke about before will not be enough for this. In order to awaken our truthful *ratzon* throughout the day, our *avodah* has to be spread out over the entire day.

We cannot give concrete rules for this to every person. But there is one point, an inner point, which we can say, and each person can take from it respectively.

Our souls do not all share the same root. Some people were born with a strong amount of *ratzon* for spiritual matters, while others are born with a burning desire for materialistic pursuits, or worse, for even the lowliest sins (*chas v’shalom*).

Let us use a savvy, ambitious businessman as an example for what we are trying to convey here. Many businessmen are constantly filled with motivation, every second. We are not discussing about if the goal is worthy or not; a lust for money is not a good thing, but the point we see from here is that we can see the power of *ratzon*. The *ratzon* here is being clothed by an undesirable garment, but the very *ratzon* itself is a positive, healthy power that gets him very far.

Every person should thus sit and reflect: How many times a day do I feel like I really want something?

There are two parts to this reflection: what you like to avoid, and what you aspire for.

Ask yourself how much of the day you are experiencing a *ratzon* for something. What you actually want is a different question, and that will be a later stage. First, ask yourself: How often are you having a *ratzon*, whether if it’s that you’re trying to avoid pain, or something you’re pursuing?

If a person comes to the conclusion that he isn’t experiencing that much *ratzon* for anything – only rarely – he should sit himself once every hour, and think for half a minute: “What do I want from myself? What do I want??”

We do not mean that one should make for himself a *cheshbon hanefesh* every hour; we just mean that one should awaken in himself a truthful point he is striving for, something he has begun to want from himself: “Do I want something, or do I not want something? If I do want something – what is it that I want?”

Work on this one point, and then slowly more and more, increase these exercises throughout the day. If you were doing this once an hour, for example, start doing this reflection once every 50 minutes. Keep reminding yourself of this simple point: “What do I want? Is there anything I want in life, or am I just like a rock that doesn’t want anything...?”

We should again mention that before doing this, *hisbodedus* must precede it; we discussed this in the previous chapters. Without *hisbodedus*, the current *avodah* doesn’t really begin, and it will just feel like some pressurized homework; nothing will come of it, and it leads to failure.

Summary of Our Avodah

Let us summarize our *avodah* from what we learned in the beginning of this *sefer*, up until the current point.

We explained at length before that a person needs an hour every day in which he clarifies what he wants, and that he should beg Hashem that he should want. After doing this, a person hopefully arrived at the point in which he clarified to himself that the only *ratzon* which he must have is to have a desire for closeness to Hashem.

A person then comes to a point that he realizes, that although he knows he must have this *ratzon*, he doesn’t actually have the *ratzon*. Now what? He needs to remind himself more and more throughout the day about this. He needs to figure out what his *ratzon* currently is, because he never figured out his *ratzon* yet.

A person should keep doing this more often throughout the day, clarifying to himself what his *ratzon* is, more and more. Hopefully he will come to feel his true *ratzon* alive more and more – and after this, the *avodah* is to purify that *ratzon* even more.

When people just look for what to do “*l’maaseh*”, or what *mitzvos* and *chumros* (stringencies) to work on – and they never built themselves up inside in the way we have described – they might get a lot of deeds done, but they will be missing the inner point.

Doing “more” *mitzvos* is not our ultimate goal; Chazal say that even the emptiest Jew is full of *mitzvos*, equal to the amount of seeds inside a pomegranate.²⁸ Why then are they called “empty”? They are still empty, because they are missing the inner point of it all.

²⁸ *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 4:3

In order for a person to live like a true Jew, his aspirations have to become very real. We do not mean for one to engage in self-aggravation or for one to constantly fear sin every second. Those are high levels. We are referring to a much simpler point: that we should always be in a wanting mode. When a person always has a *ratzon*, he awakens the depths of his soul – and he will then have the energy to serve his Creator.

As long as a person's aspirations to improve in *ruchniyus* are still weak, he might have very lofty thoughts, and he is well aware intellectually of what he has to do...but then he builds himself upon this, and what he has built will not last. A true *ratzon* needs to be developed, and it can take full months to work on it. Only then will one have the possibility of truly building himself, with the help of Hashem.

May Hashem merit all of us to recognize what's going on in the depths of our soul, how really deep down, "It is our will to do Your will" (*retzoneinu laasos retzoncha*); and that we should awaken our *ratzon* to become more alive and active. As a result, we should merit from this as well to keep to our *ratzon* and become close to the Creator.

2.3 | *Ratzon Is Unlimited*

Nothing Stands In The Way of Your True, G-dly Will

We have already mentioned the famous statement of our Sages, “Nothing stands in the way of the will.” This is only referring, however, to our *innermost* will; things can definitely get in the way of our external *retzonos*, but not our innermost *ratzon*.

Chazal state that “a king can break fences, and no one can protest.” When a person reaches his innermost, truest desire of his soul – he has reached the King of the world in doing so, and nothing can get in the way of the King of the world. Hashem can do whatever He wants.

A human being is limited, and there are things that hold a person back. But when one succeeds in reaching his innermost point – the G-dliness that is deep within his heart – he reveals his true *ratzon*, and nothing will get in the way of that *ratzon*. It is G-dly in its nature, and thus it is unstoppable, because nothing can get in Hashem’s way.

A person’s *avodah* is thus to reveal this innermost *ratzon*. After that, the rest will happen by itself.

It is written, “*To man belongs the arrangements of his heart, and from Hashem is the answer.*” When a person first “arranges” his heart - in other words, when he reaches his G-dly point within himself, it will then happen that “*from Hashem is the answer.*”

This does not simply mean that from now on, Hashem does the rest; the depth of this matter is rather that when a person manages to reveal his G-dly point, he attains a response from Hashem, because he has essentially revealed Hashem within himself by reaching the G-dliness found deep in his soul.

How We Can Reach Our Innermost Will

How can a person awaken himself to reach his essence – his innermost *ratzon*?

Chazal state that *talmidei chachamim*²⁹ have no *menuchah*³⁰ on this world or on the next. They never have *menuchah* because they are always moving from one attainment to the next. This shows us what’s going on deep in our soul; let us explain.

Why don’t *talmidei chachamim* have *menuchah*? It is because the soul is rooted in G-dliness, in the Endlessness of Hashem; thus it is always yearning to integrate with its source, Hashem. Until

²⁹ *Torah scholars*

³⁰ *serenity*

the soul becomes integrated with Hashem, it can't have *menuchah*. Hashem is infinite, so there is no end to how close we can come to Him – and since the soul is constantly moving to become closer to Him, it never has *menuchah*, because it is an endless pursuit.

In order for a person to awaken his innermost *ratzon*, he needs to reveal the soul's source, from which we were fashioned out of. When the soul becomes aware of its essence – that it is rooted in G-dliness, in the Infinite – it is then that the true desire of the soul is awakened, and it will yearn to return to its Source. Such a *ratzon*, when it gets revealed, is unlimited. It is a *ratzon* which can break all barriers.

As long as a person's aspirations are limited, his *ratzon* is human in its nature, and things can hold it back from happening. After all, humans are limited beings. But when the *ratzon* of a person becomes unlimited, it is a *ratzon* rooted in the Infinite that lays inherent in the soul. Nothing can stop this *ratzon*. One's *avodah* is thus to get his *ratzon* to become unlimited.

When a person only has a superficial perspective, such a concept seems impossible: "How can there be a *ratzon* which is unstoppable? I know from myself that it's just not possible."

Chazal³¹ state that it is possible for one to think that he can become as holy as Hashem, but in the end this is not possible. This shows us that there is a place in our soul which aspires for the unlimited. The fact that we are human makes us limited in the *human* sense, but the soul inside us is able to have unlimited aspirations.

The Root Behind The Mistake: The "Separated" Mentality

The reason why people feel limited in their aspirations is really because they have an incorrect mentality. We can give a *moshol*³² that helps us understand why.

A person is given 20 kilo to carry. He thinks to himself: How on earth can I carry 20 kilo? My hands weigh a lot less than 20 kilo; these light little hands can't carry so much."

What is his mistake? He's right that his hands weigh very little, but he's wrong in that he can't carry the 20 kilo, because he's forgetting that his hands are attached to his body and that he can carry much more. He's looking at his hands like a separate entity, apart from the rest of his body.

This *moshol* is very clear in its lesson, but it still a deep lesson nonetheless.

If we just look at ourselves from a perspective that we are humans, then we will not be able to do anything. In reality, we can't even open our mouth without receiving a life-sustaining energy from Hashem. If a person looks at himself as apart from Hashem, *chas v'shalom*, then he thinks

³¹ *Vayikra Rabbah* 24: 9

³² *parable*

of himself in terms of how strong he is, and that he is bound to inevitable laws of nature; he might admit he needs some *siyata d'shmaya* but he still views his existence as separate from Hashem.

People limit their aspirations because they really view themselves as “separate” from the Creator. In reality, we can't be sustained for one second without receiving a life-giving energy from Hashem. If a person would realize that he has G-dliness inherent within him, he would also conclude that he contains the unlimited in himself. His hands are really like a “long hand” extending from Hashem.

Our mission is first to realize where we are drawing our energy from. If a person thinks that he's getting the energy from himself – in other words, he views himself as separate from Hashem, on his own – from where will he be sustained from?! How can he do anything?

When a person understands this inner point, that a Jew has a power that lies deep within him, a “messenger of Hashem” in himself – it is then that he will be able to understand how “nothing stands in the way of the will.”

In order for a person to reveal his *ratzon*, he must first identify from where he is getting his energy from. When we just look at the plain reality we see, we are limited by the fact that we are human. But if we gain the perspective from the *emunah* in our soul, we can see how nothing is limited – everything is miraculous. The G-dliness in a person is what allows any person to do any action, and that is the inner force that's making everything happen. We don't do a thing on our own.

Example - Our Speech

How can we awaken ourselves to help feel this concept more? We can give a few examples.

Let's say a person is reading aloud a *possuk* in a Chumash. He can think to himself: “From where do I get the energy to move my lips? A small child cannot talk, but I can. How did it happen that I am able to talk?”

The *possuk* says that when Hashem breathed into Adam a “*nefesh chayah*”, a “living spirit”, which *Targum Onkelos* interprets to mean “*ruach memalelah*”, a “talking spirit.” In other words, the Torah is telling us that when I'm talking (not just when *Adam Harishon* spoke!), it's only due to the G-dliness inside me that keeps being renewed.³³ The reason why I am able to talk this moment is because Hashem breathed into man a *nefesh chayah* – a *ruach memalelah*. As I speak this very instant, Hashem is moving my lips!

³³ *As it is written, “He who renews in His goodness, every day, the act of creation.”*

In other words, a person can take his simple words which he utilizes every day and stop for a second, and think: What is causing my lips to move? Is it me – or Hashem?

At Har Sinai, there was a “great voice” which some commentaries explain to mean that it did not stop, and that it continues until today. The first step in one’s *avodah* is to realize from where his talking – his speech is rooted in Hashem’s voice. Upon realizing this, one can reach a higher stage – to realize how the “great voice” does not ever stop. It is for one to realize that his voice, which is enabled through Hashem, is really unlimited. In this way, a person is able to connect to Hashem even as he’s talking, and he is connected to the great voice that begun at Har Sinai, which never stops.

Why don’t people ever think like this? It is because while people are aware that speech comes from Hashem, the natural inclination is that since he controls what comes out of his mouth, he thus feels that his speech isn’t being enabled by Hashem.

Speech is a G-dly power, and through recognizing this, one can transform his whole attitude toward his power to speak – not because he has reached a high level, but because he realizes simply that it is Hashem who is talking.

“A righteous person decrees, and Hashem fulfills.” The meaning of this is because the *tzaddik* realizes that it is Hashem who makes the decrees, and that is what allows the decree to become fulfilled.

In order for a person to realize that his speech is really coming from Hashem, he needs to have a palpable *emunah* of Hashem in his heart.

We Are Limited, Yet Unlimited

We can give another example of the concept. When a person is moving his hand, it seems that this is because his brain has sent messages to his hand that it should move. But if you think about it, how much can a person really move his hand around? If a person keeps his body perfectly still, he will discover that his hand can barely reach anything. The hands alone are quite limited – that is, if we just look at is human layer.

Yet, since our body receives vitality from the life-giving G-dliness in it that sustains it every second, that makes our hands unlimited. Nothing is really limiting our hands, because it is receiving energy every second from Hashem.

Basya, the daughter of Pharaoh, stretched out her hand as far as she could to rescue Moshe in the basket, and then a miracle happened and her hand stretched out for much longer. How did this happen exactly? Simply speaking, it was a miracle. But the depth behind this matter is that

because she believed that her hands are being enabled by Hashem, nothing limits Hashem, and thus her hand was able to go beyond its human limits.

By the war with Amalek, the Torah writes, “*the hands of Moshe were heavy.*” As long as they thought that their power was up to themselves, they found themselves to be limited. But when the Jewish people dedicated their hearts toward their Father in Heaven, suddenly the hands of Moshe were no longer heavy. They recognized that it is Hashem who is providing all energy, and nothing can stop Him.

A person finds himself limited in his resources when he feels that he is helpless and bound to the laws of human limits. When a person realizes that the source of his energy is really coming from Hashem – since we all have G-dliness within us – then the person will find that he is unlimited.

All of our inner work lies in this concept.

We find that because there is gravity, things are naturally pulled toward the earth. Gravity shows us that the natural inclination of people is to be drawn toward materialism, towards “the earth.” Our mission, however, is to fight against this pull and to return to recognizing our G-dliness, and that we don’t have to be bound to the laws of nature. When a person realizes there is a G-dliness in him behind everything, he will find that nothing is impossible, and that he can ascend towards Hashem, unlimited.

As a person decides that he will begin to serve Hashem better, he begins to have aspirations and goals that he would like to reach. But first he must think: Who is giving me the strength to get there? Is it coming from my own energy? “*The thoughts in the heart of a man are many...*” But if he understands that the only source which gives him any possibility of growth is Hashem, he will discover that he doesn’t have to limit himself in his aspirations; he can have unlimited aspirations.

A person has to always come to the simple realization that if I can’t feel that it is Hashem who is behind the scenes in everything, I can’t do a thing; and if I do realize that Hashem is behind it all, why should I then feel limited?

Know the Goal from the Start

A person needs to reflect into this a lot in order for this point to become more alive in his life. It should not be just some piece of knowledge. In this point lays our entire inner abilities that can help push us to truly serve Hashem.

When a person just runs into *Avodas Hashem* without ever wondering what’s enabling him to proceed, he resembles someone taking off on a trip without any gas in his tank. What will

happen? He will get stuck in the middle, and there will be no “gas stations” around – and he’ll be stranded. And then has to walk back to where he started, because he has no other choice...

But if a person is level-headed, he goes into his trip with a plan from the start. He sees how far the trip will take and how much gas he needs.

When it comes to *Avodas Hashem*, the journey is unlimited, so maybe one will ask: If I don’t how long this is going to take, how am I supposed to plan anything out beforehand? How do you fill up on ‘gas’ when the journey is unlimited?

The truth is that it is a very long journey, and it takes up a whole lifetime! Every Jew comes from the *Ein Sof* – the endless light of Hashem, which has become downsized and contracted more and more until it became the level of a human. Our purpose is to return to that endlessness and become integrated with it. Thus, our *avodah* is really endless. If we limit our resources for the journey, then yes, we will be very limited throughout the journey.

A person must therefore think to himself: “To where exactly do I want to get to? To Hashem! And who is Hashem? He is infinite, and upon myself and each Jew it is said, “*Talmidei chachomim* have no *menuchah*, not on this world and not the next.” If so, how am I supposed to receive unlimited resources to get by this world, as well as in the next world? If I don’t take Hashem with me from the start, I won’t have that G-dly push, and I might as well give up already from the start.”

Before you begin the journey of *Avodas Hashem*, you have to know exactly to where you want to get to, and how much energy is needed for this. If you reflect into this, you will discover that you can only receive energy from Hashem for this.

The desire in a person to run into *Avodas Hashem* quickly, without any carefully planned thought, is advice from the *yetzer hora*. On Pesach, the people rushed out of Egypt hastily, and this was a holy kind of hastiness; but hastiness can also be used as a tactic of the *yetzer hora* to deter one from his goal.

Before anything, one has to have the basic understanding what his goal is that he is aspiring for. When we see that the journey is endless, that obligates us to realize that we need Hashem to give us the energy to get to where we have to get to.

Know this before you begin to enter *Avodas Hashem*. At first, this concept will start out “on” your heart – “*al*” *levavecha* - but as you continue, you are able to merit from Hashem that it should become “in” your heart as well, *b’levavecha*; that the matter will internalize.

May Hashem help all of us realize that we become clear in our *Avodas Hashem*, about Whom we are serving, and what the way is to get truly close to Him is. All of us should be *zoche* in this way to eternally connect with the living Almighty.

2.4 | *Ways To Develop Your Ratzon*

To Feel That We Are Missing Something

We have already mentioned in the earlier chapters that without developing our true *ratzon* (will), we will lack motivation for carrying out any practical improvement in our *avodah*. The stronger we get our *ratzon* to be, the more energy for *avodah* we will have, and the converse is true as well: the weaker one's *ratzon* is, the less motivated he will be to do any *avodah*.

We can compare this to a spring. If it is a sturdy spring, the more we push on it, the more force it will spring out with. But if it weak, it doesn't have so much force.

Let us now continue and explain how we can awaken our *ratzon* and bring it to its revelation, so that our *ratzon* can reach its full strength.

A fundamental rule is that the more a person feels he is missing something, the more he will push himself to get it. If a person doesn't feel so strongly that he's missing something, he won't push himself that much to get what he's missing.

In order to awaken our *ratzon* within us, our *avodah* is thus to get to a situation in which we truly feel that we're missing something. When we actually feel that we are missing something, our *ratzon* can get strengthened, and it will then be that "nothing stands in the way of the will.

How can a person bring himself to a situation in which he feels that there is something he's missing? For this, a person will have to make use of both his abilities of *shelo lishmah* (to act for ulterior reasons) and *lishmah* (to act with pure motives).

We will focus more on how one can use his *lishmah*. This is a bit difficult, and if someone hasn't yet developed his inner world properly up until now, he won't be able to really understand his situation, and he will find it hard to agree with what we will say here. It will be too difficult of an *avodah* for him to work on.

There are things we are missing so far from our past, as well as things we are missing that we need to gain in the future. A person should look at the today from the lens of the future. Even if today doesn't seem to a person that he's missing so much, from a perspective of the future, we are missing a lot!

One can picture how he would like to look when he's very old. Would anyone want to be the way he is now when he's very old and near the end of his life?

Anyone who thinks about this will get immediately awakened to feel like he's missing a lot in his life.

This shouldn't be too hard for anyone to do. Even a very superficial person can understand this; it's not so hard to imagine one's future and hope to be very fulfilled in one's later years. Anyone can identify with the wish that he needs to improve his situation and fit into the mold he has formed for himself, the kind of person he would like to be by the time he leaves this world.

This is one part of the job: imagine your future and what you want to be like. Now you can see that in your present day, you still have a lot you're missing in terms of development.

But there is another aspect in what we are lacking, and this is harder for a person to work on. This is for a person to look at his past and then see what level he is at in comparison to where he should be holding now.

A person has an ego that will not feel comfortable thinking about this. People naturally don't like to think about their imperfections, because that would equate to a feeling of low self-worth – and the ego in a person wants to avoid this feeling.

The truth is, however, that thinking about one's low level in spirituality doesn't have to cause in you a feeling of low self-worth. But the fact of the matter is that people naturally assume that it will cause such a feeling, and therefore people naturally avoid thinking into such things. People run away from dealing with their imperfections, and they definitely do not want to live with such knowledge. (That is why this part of the job is harder to work on.)

These are the two aspects to what we are missing – either when we look from a perspective of our future (about how we would like to grow more and become more fulfilled), or by comparing our present moment to our past and seeing what we haven't gotten yet in our *ruchniyus*.

The Pros and Cons of Reading Gedolim Biographies

What can help a person realize how much he is missing in his *ruchniyus*? There are several ways.

One example is that a person can read a book about stories of Gedolim. When we read about their lives, we can compare what they were like at the same age we are at right now – and we see how much of a higher level they were on when they were our age.

Now, if a person is reading such a book and he sees how far he is from the level these Gedolim were at when they were his very age – if he searches for the truth, a fear grips him, and he thinks to himself: “Look at how much this *Gadol* did when he was my age. I'm a fully grown adult and I am on a way lower level than this *Gadol* was at my age.”

However, although this can give a person a push to improve himself and try to attain those high levels he is reading about (and even this should only be attempted on condition that a person truly feels that he is ready to strive for such a level), there is a danger here as well. The danger is that a person will feel, “This *Gadol* was on such a high level when he was my age. Look at me –

I'm on such a low level." When a person feels this way, he has no chance whatsoever to succeed. He will go lost.

On a deeper note, it is detrimental to do this because comparing yourself to another is never a good thing. Why should a person compare himself, even to a *tzaddik*? We all have unique abilities, and a person is only tested in life according to **his** true capabilities. Chazal state that "Just as all faces are not equal, so are all opinions not equal." Each person has his unique natures and situations in life. Thus, whenever we compare ourselves with others, it's an incorrect attitude.

We must know that everything in Creation was created by Hashem for a good purpose. Chazal³⁴ say that "jealousy of Torah scholars increases wisdom", and while this is true, often the way that the person is jealous is an incorrect attitude. We cannot judge anyone unless we are in his place, and as the Kotzker Rebbe said, we never get to another person's place and thus we can never judge anyone. So although Chazal say that jealousy can be used in a constructive way, we must understand that jealousy is only meant to be used as a tool to bring us closer to Hashem; it can indeed give a person a push to strive for higher levels when he sees that his friend is higher than him. Jealousy is only constructive when it doesn't shatter one's feeling of self-worth.

So we must never compare ourselves to others. That is one danger we must avoid.

On the other hand, there is another way to look at it, and that is as follows. If one is reading a book about a *Gadol*, and he sees how great he was – he can think to himself: "Who says that this *Gadol* had more energies than I do? Maybe he had much less spiritual resources than I do, and yet he still achieved his greatness!"

In other words, we cannot make any definite comparisons between ourselves and the *Gedolim* we read about. But what we can do is wonder that maybe we have even more energy than those *Gedolim*, and this can give us a push to work on ourselves. After all, it's possible for you to reach those levels!

This is something constructive we can do, and it is recommended as well.

The truth is that this advice comes from the Ramchal.³⁵ He writes there that a person should read stories of *Gedolim*, and this will awaken him to compare his deeds to theirs and thus work to improve himself.

Let's say, for example, that a person reads about how a certain *tzaddik* was always close to Hashem his entire life, and that he never forgot about Hashem for even a moment. A person can think to himself upon reading this: For how much time of the day do I indeed remember Hashem? How much time did this *tzaddik* remember Hashem...?

³⁴ *Bava Basra 22a*

³⁵ *See sefer Derech Eitz Chaim*

Such stories, when we read about them, have to awaken in us a feeling that we are truly a “*cheilek eloka mimaal*”, a “portion of G-d above” – and thus we have an ability in ourselves to always be connected to Hashem, 24/7. This can awaken in us an inner yearning – if that *gadol* was able to do such a thing, so can I!

Having A Sense of Direction In Life

When a person already comes in with the negative attitude that he can never become a *gadol*, he is dooming himself from ever attaining all of his aspirations. We have already explained this point earlier³⁶: that the truth is that each individual Jew is capable of becoming a great person!

Although every person has his own unique soul, the *Rishonim* write that anyone can reach the level of Moshe Rabbeinu. In other words, any person can reach his soul root, and then he is connected to his Creator as a direct result. Understandably, the levels of *d'veykus* with Hashem that a person can have differ according to the level of each soul root, but the fact that we can all reach the essence of our soul is something anyone is capable of attaining.

If a person searches for the truth, and he reads stories of *Gedolim*, he should picture to himself the following.

The possuk says, “*The days of our years are seventy, and if they are strong, eighty years.*” Eventually, a person dies. A person can imagine the following (each person according to how much he can do this): His soul is leaving this world after death. He comes to the Heavenly Court. He is judged worthy to go to Gan Eden. He is being escorted to Gan Eden.

Now, he should continue to imagine: Who does he meet there? Who is together with him in Gan Eden? If he sees someone he knows there who wasn't that close to Hashem – would he want to sit with him in Gan Eden? Of course not. Look around and see if there are any people sitting there whom you would like to be with in Gan Eden – people of high spiritual stature. One thing is for sure – you definitely don't want to sit in Gan Eden with people who aren't on a high spiritual level. It's demeaning to your stature.

In this physical world, a person's level can change, but in the world of eternal truth, the level of closeness to Hashem that a person reached stays the same, forever. It's permanent.

Now think to yourself: That permanent level of closeness to Hashem that you will have in the next world – wouldn't you give anything right now in your life to be on that level?

If a person wants to make sure that he will later be one day someone different than who is today, then the first thing he can do for this is to be clear where he wants to go. He can think to himself: “Will thinking about Hashem just once a day help me? No, that's not enough. Such

³⁶ see *Chapter Eight: Aspirations for Greatness*

thoughts are supposed to spur me on to want to live with Hashem every moment. Anything less than this won't satisfy me."

Practically speaking, however, one should not immediately jump to trying to feel Hashem in his life every second. If someone tries to do this, he will become greatly delusional. What we mean here is that a person should know what it is that he is searching for himself, what his goal in life is that he wants to get to.

When a person sets down this aspiration for himself – an aspiration to truly connect with Hashem – this must cover all areas of a person's life. We need to become connected to Hashem in our learning, in our mitzvos, in our middos, etc. If not, it is impossible to really connect with Hashem.

A person should be clear with himself this one point: "If I don't reach my goal in life (closeness to Hashem), I have missed the purpose of my life."

After doing this reflection, one should examine what he was like a year ago: "How close was I to Hashem a year ago, and where am I holding today in comparison to a year ago?"

If you see that there has been a change in how close you are to Hashem, this is a sign that you have grown. If you see that you haven't changed at all yet, then you have to cry out to Hashem from the depths of your heart and say: "If I remain the way I am for another year, I am basically dead in my ruchniyus. Without being close to Hashem, life is death, because only a life of closeness to Hashem is considered a life."

A person should think about this for a long time: "If I'm not feeling closer to Hashem, it's like death. I don't want to be like the wicked, who are considered dead in their lifetime. I have to get out of this kind of life and instead enter a life which will bring me to the truth."

Again, let us repeat that we do not mean for one to immediately jump to actualizing these aspirations. The main thing at this point is for one to have the inner yearning every day, week after week. These words should keep ringing in your ears, day after day, night after night.

With the help of Hashem, after a person feels a change in himself, he should then examine the quality of how much he has changed. Usually, most people only experience a minimal kind of change. Only certain rare individuals are truly serving Hashem as they should and experience changes of high quality.

A person should imagine to himself how he will look in thirty or forty years from now, and he should think to himself: "Even if by then I've grown twice as much as I am now, it's still not enough; there's a lot more room to grow."

Or, you can go outside and see some old people walking by you, and then ask yourself: “Do I want to look like that when I’m so old – empty and unfulfilled from life – or do I want to look like how the Gedolim looked in their old age, who only grew wiser with the more they aged?”

Do we want to look fulfilled when we are old – or do we want to just go from Rosh Hashanah to Rosh Hashanah with all our various kaballos we made from year to year, which never lasted...?

A person has to realize that if he keeps going the way he has been living his life until now, he has no chance of ever really growing (except if he is a rare individual). He’s like a person who climbs a broken ladder – he will never get to the top. He should also realize that the way he is now will be the way he is the next world, which is eternal, and it can never be changed at that point. The time to change is now.

One has to decide on this world, now, what he wants from his life: “Where do I want to be in life when I’m old, to what am I aspiring for in the eternal life after this one? Do I want to be in a lower place in Gan Eden, or in a higher place? Do I aspire to learn in the beis midrash of Hakadosh Baruch Hu....?”

There are no games in the next world. It is the truth. The Zohar even states that the way we are on this world is the way we are on the next world – exactly! If a person on this world wasn’t connected with his Creator, chas v’shalom, then even if he kept all the mitzvos, he will not have any d’veykus with Hashem in the next world.

The next world is like the “fruits” we enjoy from the “seeds” we planted on this world. We need to plant those “seeds” – with the more we grow, the more seeds we are planting for the next world to enjoy the produce.

Thus, a person has to come to the clear decision about life: What exactly am I aspiring for?

It is not enough to think about this for just the half hour that a person learns *mussar* – “Yes, I know, it’s true, that’s what it says in *Mesillas Yescharim*, I know this...”, even if at the end of a half-hour he comes to a decision about this. Such decisions will not last.

The decision has to come from our emunah - that a person believes that he is able to actualize his decision. If a person doesn’t believe that he has the abilities to reach this aspiration, he’s only fooling himself if he “decides” what he wants from himself in his life, because it will not work. One has to really believe that he can arrive at this.

If we tell a person, “Are you willing to put down a hundred dollars that you will aspire for this?” and he refuses, it’s all because he doesn’t believe in himself that he is able to reach this aspiration. Such a person probably won’t even put down ten dollars over this. He doesn’t believe himself, so even if he accepts upon himself that he will try to reach this aspiration, he’s just lying to himself; he merely wants, but he doesn’t believe that he can actually get there.

A person has to believe that he is able to actualize this great aspiration in life; not that he has to have blind trust, but that he is able to try; that even if he fails, he shouldn't give up, and keep persevering. One has to run after this goal as much as he can and not slacken off from it. The main thing is for a person to believe in himself that he can reach it.

(Of course, all of our energy comes from Hashem; we are merely explaining here what our soul has to feel when we make decisions about how we will live our life).

External Anchors That Help You Keep To Your Decision

There is an amazing method which can help a person test himself to see if he has really decided that he will live his life with this sense of direction.

Every person has friends – some have more friends than others, but everyone has friends. A person should imagine that one of his friends is coming to him and telling him: “I couldn't fall asleep last night. I am tossing and turning at night, because I feel like I'm not growing in life.”

Now imagine that your friend is telling you all of his areas that he's trying to work on. You ask him, “Nu, what are you supposed to do? Lose sleep for the rest of your life over this? And he tells you – “No! I'm ready to give up everything to change. I will use all my energy to live a life for Hashem.”

The gain of this exercise is because normally, a person doesn't see his own faults, because he's defensive of his ego. But if you see yourself from the outside, you get a more unbiased view of yourself, and you get to know about yourself better. By imagining yourself in the form of a close friend who's talking to you and telling you that “he” wants to improve himself, you will be much more ready to help your “friend” change...

When doing this, ask yourself if your “friend” would agree with your various arguments. Would he believe how earnest you are in your desire to improve?

There is a story told of Rav Dessler zt”l that he tried to quit smoking many times. He resolved many times to quit, but he just couldn't stop the smoking addiction. Once he resolved firmly that he is going to stop, cold turkey. He began to look for advice on how he could keep to his decision. He was a smart man – he knew that if it was so hard for him to quit until now, there would be no point in trying those same tactics anymore to quit. He knew that for this one, he's going to need something extreme to get him to stop.

He did some thinking, and then he figured something out – and he was able to quit smoking! How did he do it? He told people around him that he will not be seen with a cigarette if anyone comes to visit him in his office. Because he felt too ashamed in front of them to go back on his word, the fear of being seen as a liar overpowered his temptation for a cigarette.

Most people would react to this story that he was acting *shelo lishmah* to get himself to stop smoking. Actually, he was acting *lishmah*; but since he knew that there are external factors threatening his decision to stop smoking, he decided to use various external tools to avoid those chances.

This is an example of how to truly serve Hashem. A truthful person uses other factors to get him to keep to his decisions.

If someone isn't truthful like this, then it is not recommended that he tell people that he wants to change and improve, because he's already feeling deep down, "The day might come that I can't keep to my resolutions, and then I'll be ashamed from everyone I've told that I'll change."

So if a person decides that he is going to change and work on a certain area to improve, it is recommended that he create for himself a situation in which he will find it almost impossible to go back on his word.

We do not mean for one to do extreme things for this. Don't run away from people – instead be with people, and have for yourself factors which will make it very hard for you to go back on your decisions.

Each person needs different factors to help him stay to his decisions – what works for one person doesn't always work for another. But the common denominator between all people is that all people need external factors in the environment to help them keep to their word.

For example, if a person knows that he is weak when it comes to certain areas in his *ruchniyus*, and he resolves to improve in these areas – he should inform a friend about it. It has to be someone he's embarrassed of if he fails, because if it's a friend whom he feels no shame in front of, it's pointless. Pick a friend whom you will find it very unpleasant for you if he finds out you're not keeping to your word.

If you see yourself failing in an area, you don't have to tell him all the details of how you failed. Just tell him – "I wasn't successful again with this area."

Really, every person wants to do what's right, because he knows the truth. It is just that we have a body which gets in our way and sways us from what we know is right. In order to pacify our body, we need to create for ourselves a situation in which we will feel ashamed to give in to our body's demands. This shame can be, for example, if one will feel embarrassed in front of a certain person if that person finds out he didn't keep to his resolution.

Without making such resolutions to want to change, it is almost definite that a person will fail in keeping to his decisions (besides for rare individuals who are very strong when it comes to self-control).

Only Take On Normal Changes

Caution is advised with this point. Make sure that you set for yourself normal limits that will help you succeed – don't place on yourself extreme limits. That will only hamper you from succeeding.

For example, if a person learns for 10 hours a day and he resolves to learn 18 hours a day, and he makes up that if he doesn't learn the 18 hours, he will give 1,000 dollars to *tzedakah* – there's no chance he'll succeed in keeping to such a resolution! Any normal person understands this. It is totally unrealistic. Maybe you can have an aspiration that you will one day learn 18 hours a day, but don't attempt to carry this out (besides for this reason, in today's generation, it is almost impossible to learn for so long, because we are much weaker today physically than in previous generations).

Not only are these unrealistic aspirations, but the external factors which one is trying to use here to help him keep to his changes is also abnormal. He will fail a few times, and then he'll give up altogether.

Any resolution one takes upon himself has to be realistic. For example, if someone learns 10 hours a day, it is unrealistic that he accept upon himself to learn for 14 hours a day. However, what he can do is take upon himself to add on another 15 minutes of learning a day, or another 30 minutes a day; and he can make up that if he doesn't keep to this resolution, that he will give every day some money to *tzedakah* (an amount that will he will be a little annoyed to give).

Generally speaking, the way how one can know if his resolutions are real or not is by seeing if he can fall asleep at night. When people take on resolutions that are too hard for them, they can't fall asleep at night, and it's a sign that the commitment was too much for him.

When a person resolves to change and he's full of anxiety inside from this, it shows that his *ratzon* isn't strong enough yet. One should never take on resolutions like this that cause one to get anxious. What a person should do instead is to really decide that he wants to work on a certain area, and only after deciding that he indeed wants to work on it, can he then take on resolutions happily, to help him keep to his *ratzon*.

When a resolution to change isn't made happily, it shows that it's only a mental decision in a person's head to change – the person hasn't yet decided with his heart that he is resolving to change.

So each person has to see at what level his heart is at, and to firmly feel how much he's missing right now in his life – and that he wishes to fill what he lacks in his life. Then, resolutions must be made to try to get there.

The words we have said here are the true test for a person to see if he's really being oived Hashem (serving G-d) or not. Someone who isn't being truthful with himself might try different things other than what we have said here, but he's scared of taking responsibility over his failures. He

avoids pressuring himself whatsoever to really change. The truth of such a person's situation is that he doesn't really have a *ratzon* to improve. He just wants to be free from any sort of pressure.

Hashem created the world so that we can have a *kabalas ol malchus shomayim* – to accept upon ourselves the yoke of Heaven. It is a necessity for each individual to have the *ol*, a responsibility. The level of *ol* differs with each person, but we all need an *ol*. We all must take responsibility for ourselves.

Let us emphasize that all which we have said above can only help someone who has already awakened in himself a *ratzon*, and he thus seeks to help himself keep to his *ratzon* by creating for himself more motivating factors.

But if someone finds that his resolutions are only making him feel anxious inside, then he needs to go back to the previous stage and awaken his *ratzon*. He should ask himself: “Do I really want to serve Hashem, or not? Yes, I want to!” (Let's assume he's already passed this stage, though). Then he should ask himself: “How much I am willing to give to Hashem of my life, in order to really serve Him?”

When a person truly awakens his *ratzon* and he comes to realize that “We only have one desire, for our Father in Heaven” – he will surely merit true closeness with Hashem.

2.5 | *Investing In Your Ratzon*

You Want Something That's Important

There is another point we will explain about *ratzon* (the will).

It is written, “*A man according to his praise.*” Every person’s level is determined by certain things he wants; people want the things that they place value on.

Every person has a different sense of value for different things, and no one is alike in this aspect. What all people have in common, though, is that we all must place the most value on what the truth is. *How* to get to the truth depends on each person – but the fact that truth must be our top priority is something that applies to all people.

Before we get into the inner dimensions of this discussion, we will reflect on some examples from the physical world to help us understand what we mean.

Let’s say a person needs to buy a new washing machine and an oven. He comes to the store and realizes that he only has enough money to buy one of them. He has no choice but to decide which one he needs more; he learns how to prioritize his needs. If he chooses one item over the other, it’s not because he doesn’t value the other item. It is just that he has to see which one he really needs more: Is it going to be harder for me if I don’t have a washing machine than if I don’t have an oven, or vice versa?

The point we see from this is that a person can get to know what he wants by comparing two different needs and seeing which one he’d rather give up so he can get the other. By learning how to prioritize, you get to know what you want.

In our life, there are many things which we try to do that don’t come to fruition. If a person wants to awaken and reveal his *ratzon*, he first needs to see how important his *ratzon* is in comparison to other *retzonos* he has, and that will get him to know if he really has the *ratzon*.

How Much Do You Want It?

Now we will give a spiritual example of what we mean, and it is a way for a person to test himself to see if he really wants something.

Let’s assume that somebody comes to the conclusion that the *sefer Mesillas Yescharim* will be the *sefer* that is most helpful to him in his *Avodas Hashem*, so he decides that he needs to go out to the store and buy the *sefer*. After he’s clear about this, he should reflect with himself: “How much

money am I willing to spend to get a *sefer Mesillas Yescharim*? Even more so, how much emotional investment am I willing to put into this?”

A person needs to clarify this with himself. He might discover that he's not willing to spend any money to buy the *sefer*, because it's a cheap *sefer* that's on the shelf in any *Beis Midrash* – and therefore maybe it's not worth it to buy...

If a person is totally clear that he needs to own a *Mesillas Yescharim*, he must ask himself if he's really prepared to spend money on this *sefer*, since it's a *sefer* that can be found anywhere. (This is before a person decides how much he is willing to invest in trying to implement what's *written* in *Mesillas Yescharim*...). This is a true test for how a person can know if he really has a *ratzon* (in this case, to buy *sefer Mesillas Yescharim*).

Let's go further in the example we gave: what if the person would find out that there are only three places in the world where he can get the *sefer* – and that all three locations are at the ends of the country? Would he be willing to take a three hour trip to get there so he can get the *sefer*?

Even if he is willing to take the trip so he can get the *sefer*, would he pass up the opportunity, hoping that he will hear of someone who's going there so that he can ask that person to pick it up for him – and if that doesn't happen, he's thinking: “I'll wait for *bein hazemanim*...?”

What we see from this is that it's possible that a person *knows* that something is important, but he's not actually *willing to invest* in it – and if he's not willing to invest, it shows that he doesn't really have the *ratzon*. Sure, he knows it's important – but he doesn't really value it, because if he would, he would put effort into actualizing it.

We can go even further in the above example. If a person really wants a *sefer* that he concludes will help him, and he finds out that it's only available in America and he lives in Israel, would he be willing to fly to America so he can get it? Would he be willing to sell items in his house so he can get the *sefer*? And does he have any doubts about this...?

If each person makes this internal examination, he will find that he has certain areas in which he is willing to invest a lot in, while there are other areas that he's not really willing to put so much effort into; and there are other areas that he's not sure at all about if he should put in effort or not.

Let us emphasize here that the test is about what you're willing to actually *do*, not about what you *think* you would like to do. It's easy to think about doing something worthy, but when it comes to taking action, it's a different story. Who's willing to pay for a ticket so he can fly to another country and get the *sefer* he knows will help him (if the case would theoretically present itself)?

By using this test, a person can discover if he *truly* wants something – or if he’s just *imagining* that he wants it.

How Much Is One Aspiring To Become Close to Hashem?

Until now we only gave a *moshol* (parable) of what we mean, and now we will go to the inner point of this.

Before, we spoke about a tool of how to get to Hashem – such as learning *sefer Mesillas Yesharim*. Now we will speak about the actual point we are trying to get to: [closeness with] the Blessed Creator.

It is clear to any person – both in mind and heart – that the purpose of life is to become close to Hashem. A person needs to figure out for himself, though, how much he is really willing to invest in order to reach this.

If we tell a person that for the price of one shekel you can become close to Hashem, without a doubt he’d give a shekel. He’ll pay ten shekel for this as well. Let’s say we tell him that he will have to lose sleep for two nights straight for this. (Of course, it is incorrect behavior for one to lose sleep and harm himself physically, as are required by the Torah to take care of our health; we are trying to bring out a point.) Most people would probably be willing to lose two nights of sleep to reach the purpose of life, if that would be the requirement.

But let’s say we tell a person that in order to become close to Hashem, that he might have to sleep only for three hours every day, for the entire year.” Now we will get different answers from people. Is a person willing to undergo some pain in order to reach closeness to Hashem? Would he be willing to give a foot, or an eye, or an ear for this - if so be it?

We are not referring to when someone loses to the temptation of a sin. “When the evil inclination is present, there is no mention of the good inclination.”³⁷ This is an internal kind of battle and it is a totally different kind of struggle than what we are discussing; the battle with the *yetzer hora* is a true war.

We are discussing a much simpler point – when you’re serene and the *yetzer hora* isn’t starting up with you, and only your *yetzer tov* is present. You can sit with yourself then and ask yourself how much you’re truly willing to invest in order to work on something spiritual that you want to attain. If you’re sitting by the table and things are quiet in the house, and you have no pressures going on, now is the time to really “pressure” yourself and ask yourself: how much do you really want the truth?

³⁷ *Nedarim 32b*

This helps a person figure out for himself where he's *really* holding at in his aspirations to become close to Hashem.

Let's give a simple example of what we mean. We mentioned before that a person needs an hour of *hisbodedus* every day; we brought the words of the Ramchal that if someone makes sure to always keep to doing this *hisbodedus*, he will be very close to reaching perfection, and if he doesn't, he is very far.

Therefore, a person should ask himself: "How much am I willing to invest in *hisbodedus*? Even if it's hard for me, will I try?"

Is a person, indeed, willing to give up some of his time for *hisbodedus*? Every person should clarify to himself if he really is prepared to invest for Hashem – what exactly he is prepared to give up for this, and what he's not capable of doing for this (it will be hard for the person to admit this, but this is the current reality of the person's level of *Avodas* Hashem, and he has to know at what level he's truly at); and he should know what he's not sure about.

This helps a person greatly clarify too himself how earnest he really is about his aspirations, or if he's just "saying" that he wants to grow but he doesn't really mean it.

True Love for Hashem Is Only Reached Through Mesirus Nefesh for Hashem

We have a *mitzvah* to love Hashem, and our love for Hashem is the point that brings us closer to Him and connects us to Him. The *mitzvah* to love Hashem is "*with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your means.*"

What does it mean to love Hashem "*with all your heart*"? It includes all the thoughts and feelings of our heart. Can anyone say on himself that his heart is totally for Hashem? Almost no one can say this. All people want to love Hashem with their entire heart, but the other thoughts in the heart get in the way and prevent this love.

It is indeed a long way to get to *Ahavas Hashem* (love of G-d), but the question is, if a person would be offered a path to get there that will be difficult – and he is also told that it will achieve definite results – would a person be willing to put in the effort to take that path? If, let's say, a person is told that he will have to get a leg amputated in order to acquire an everlasting love for Hashem - would he be willing to?

This internal examination can help one reach loving Hashem "*with all your heart.*"

The next part of the possuk says that we also have to love Hashem "*with all your soul.*" Chazal say on this part of the possuk that even when Hashem comes to take one's soul at the time of death, he must still love Hashem.

Chanoch was taken into Heaven by Hashem before his time, and Rashi explains that Hashem wanted him to leave this world as a righteous person, so that he shouldn't get influenced by the generation to become wicked. A person can therefore reflect: "If Hashem would give me the choice either to die and be with Him, or to remain on this world with its temptations – what would I choose? Would I really give up my life for Hashem?"

There are four possible answers: (1) Yes, I am definitely willing to give up myself for Hashem. (2) No, I am definitely not willing to give up myself for Hashem. (3) I'm really not sure. (4) I need to ask a wise person's advice about this.

We also have to love Hashem "*with all your means.*" Chazal say that this part of the *possuk* is saying that even if someone values his money more than his body, he should give up his money too for Hashem. The *possuk* is revealing to us that we don't have to always get killed for Hashem in order to show *mesirus nefesh* (though there were individuals who merited to do even this for Hashem, though). The test is about *how much a person is willing to give up of himself* for Hashem.

We know about the concept of *dying al kiddush Hashem*³⁸, but there is also a concept of *living* for Hashem. To *live al kiddush Hashem* is actually a lot more difficult than to *die al kiddush Hashem*!

How do we see this is true? We can see that each of us, deep down, are willing to give up our lives *al kiddush Hashem*; every Jew throughout the generations was willing to give up his life for Hashem as well. Why is it, though, that we find it so hard in our actual life to give up things for Hashem? Why is it so hard for us to overcome our *nisyonos* (difficulties)? The answer is: Because it's easier to die for Hashem, than to *live* for Hashem!

Not every person who is willing to die for Hashem is willing to *live* for Hashem. Why? To die *al kiddush Hashem* is a difficulty that lasts for about one second. But to *live al kiddush Hashem* is a constant struggle.

People are able to overcome unbelievably difficult situations – as long as they are only momentary hardships. Chazal say that had Chananyah, Mishael and Azarya been tortured, they wouldn't have been able to withstand the pressure on them to bow down to the idol.³⁹ *Tosafos* explain that the physical torture would have been too painful for them to endure. These *tzaddikim* were willing to get killed rather than bow down to the idol, but to endure constant physical torture – that they wouldn't have been willing to do.

³⁸ Sanctifying the Name of Hashem. The mitzvah to get killed *al kiddush Hashem* applies when a Jew is being faced with one of the three cardinal sins: murder, immorality, or idol worship; see Yuma 9a.

³⁹ Kesubos 33b

Therefore, if we want to live with a love for Hashem, we must first precede with this with true *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem. Without being willing to live a life of *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem, a person won't be able to live a true kind of life of connection with Hashem.

Recognizing That This World Is Temporary

The words here seem very far from implementing. Yet, as lofty as they are, they are still close to achieving.

Why do these matters seem so foreign to us? It is because we naturally are pulled after worldly interests. People are running around all the time on this world, pursuing their various interests – and the heart is being ignored.

But a person has to bring his life to a halt and stop all this running around. If a person doesn't think about the day of death once every day – simply put – he's not really committed to giving himself up for Hashem. The concept of death simply doesn't exist by him. He's just running and running in his life, without ever stopping to think.

Think of the following. There is no guarantee to any person that he will wake up tomorrow morning!

A person thus has to think about two things: “How do I want to live my life – and also, maybe *chas v'shalom* today is my last day on earth; how would I want to spend my last day of my life...?”

Without getting used to thinking like this, the matter of *mesirus nefesh* will be a foreign and totally alien concept to a person. But any person with a thinking mind is aware that every day, there are obituaries in the newspaper, and that nobody lives forever. Since we do not know when life will end for us, we have to think about how we would like to live our life, in case there is no tomorrow.

Without a life plan like this this, a person is too immersed in this physical world, and he will definitely not be able to gain from the next point we are about to talk about. The first thing one must know before anything is that we have no guarantee whatsoever that we will wake up the next day! There are no guarantees either that we will live even for one more second.

Of course, we do not mean to become morbid all the time and always think about death. When a person acts morbid, he just sinks into a depression and doesn't do anything about it. (There are only a few individuals who are able to think about death all the time without becoming too morbid). We just mean that a person has to live with a minimal amount of awareness that life on this world is not forever.

When a person is lying in his bed at night about to go to sleep, he should not assume that he will definitely wake up the next morning. He should make a self-accounting: “Have I fulfilled all my obligations on this world?”

Writing this down in a notebook would be helpful with this, so that he won't leave this world without paying up his debts. That is one part of what he must think – what he is leaving behind on this world if he dies.

The other part of what he must think is: “Can I really come to *Olam HaBa* the way I am now?”

The point is that no one should think that he lives forever. We do not know what will be tomorrow. This should not make a person sad; it is rather a recognition of how the design of Creation works: Hashem gave a person life, and He did not tell him how long he is going to live for.

When a person feels like he wants to run away from all this thinking, he's really running away from reality. The more a person is in touch with reality, the more he lives with an awareness that maybe today is his last day – and his life takes on a whole new meaning, as he will now appreciate life more and live it to its fullest.

By doing this, a person takes his life on this physical world and transforms it into a life of serving the Creator, and he prepares himself for the next world, the place where he is headed towards.

Only with this awareness (not just by saying it, but by living it) can a person understand the concept of *mesirus nefesh*. (We are referring to the easier kind of *mesirus nefesh*, which is to be willing to die *al kiddush Hashem*. We have not explained yet how to live a life of *mesirus nefesh*.)

Internalizing This Information In Your Feelings

From an intellectual viewpoint, anyone can see how it makes sense: We have free will on this world, and we all know that we can choose not to sin; if we sin, we lose our closeness to Hashem. If Hashem comes to a person and promises him that he'll become close to Him if he's willing to die right now, it makes sense to us from an intellectual viewpoint that he should agree, and that without a doubt it is good for him, since Hashem has promised him so. We all believe this – intellectually, that is.

(We will not get into the other external factors to consider, such as “What about my family after I die?”. We are just addressing the actual truthful point we are trying to arrive at, so we can test ourselves and see where which level we are at).

Yet, knowing about this on an intellectual level isn't enough. We have feelings also, and we need to get the information in our intellect to enter into our feelings. Our *avodah* is essentially to get our actual feelings to be in line with what we know in our intellectual minds.

One should thus sit with himself and ask himself: "If Hashem would come to me and ask me if I am prepared to die in order to be close to Him, what would I want?"

If the answer is, "Yes, I am prepared", this is very commendable. If the answer is "No", then the *avodah* is to go back to the beginning stage mentioned at the beginning of this chapter: to figure out how important the truth really is to you. We cannot jump immediately into the stage of *mesirus nefesh*, even though that is the goal we are striving for. First, we need to figure out what we are willing to give up for Hashem – and what we aren't. Then, we can keep working on this point until we feel ready to have *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem.

Each person should know exactly what he's willing to give up for Hashem, and what he isn't – and what he's not sure about.

Progressing, Step After Step

Let's give an example of how to work on this. A person has a house he lives in; is he willing to give this up for Hashem, if he would have to? If he isn't, he should ask himself what he really wants in his life more: to be close to Hashem, or to have a house? Which one do I want more, if I would have to somehow choose between the two?

Even before doing this, there is an initial stage that comes before this: to think about the purpose of life. A person should ask himself if he indeed has any aspiration to get to the purpose of life.

To summarize the plan, the first stage is to clarify what the truth is and to ask ourselves if we have any interest in getting to it. The second step is *how much* one wants it.

The purpose of life is to become close to Hashem. A person should ask himself: Is this a fact – or do I have any doubts about this? Is this piece of information just something that the *sefarim* mention, and it's a debatable point...? If a person thinks that being close to Hashem is an arguable point, then it shows that his *yetzer hora* is already succeeding at getting him to evade the purpose.

So first, one has to be totally sure in his mind that the purpose of life is to become close to Hashem. If a person has any doubts about this in his mind, then he has to clarify it – and he has to *daven* to Hashem that he be shown the light.

After this point has become clear to one's mind, one should then try to get his *ratzon* to be in line with what he knows. He should talk it out with himself: "Being close to Hashem is the

purpose of life. It is the only true good – anything else that people think is good is not the true good (as the *Mesillas Yesharim* has stated).

Imagine yourself standing in between two sides, with the side of good on one side, and all evil on the other side. Hashem is on the side of good, and everything else besides Him is standing on the side of evil. Say to yourself: “I know what the truth is in my mind, but it is my heart that feels differently.”

If there is something you’re not sure about giving up for Hashem, begin to talk with Hashem about this: “I know that I need to give this up for You, Hashem. I know that this (for example, my house) will not bring me to the purpose of my life, and I know that being close to You is the purpose. But what am I to do? I don’t **feel** that I am willing to give up anything for You yet.”

Keep saying these words – talk it out with yourself, and with Hashem as well. With yourself, you can tell yourself: “I know anything else other than closeness to Hashem is worthless, and that my feelings of doubt about this are incorrect. But that is how I feel right now.” Keep telling yourself that you know the truth in your mind, but you don’t feel it in your heart; and tell this to Hashem as well and then beg Him to help you be prepared to give up for Him.

After working on this point – which is realizing that one isn’t ready to give up for Hashem – now a person can proceed to the next step. But first, one has to realize the first step, which is that he isn’t at the level of giving up for Hashem – and he should keep repeating to himself that point, as we have said.

For all of a person’s life, a person has to keep increasing his amount of *mesirus nefesh* – how much he is willing to give up for Hashem. There are an endless amount of levels to this.

How can a person know if he has indeed reached *mesirus nefesh*? This is if he doesn’t feel any opposition in his heart at these facts, and he realizes that *mesirus nefesh* is a simple concept. As long as *mesirus nefesh* feels like an overwhelming challenge, it is a sign that the person hasn’t gotten to *mesirus nefesh* yet. As long as it stills feels like a hard thing to accept, a person has to keep working on the first stage we have said, and he must not attempt to work on the second stage.

After a person merits to feel that he’s willing to give himself up entirely for Hashem – in other words, if he is prepared to die *al kiddush Hashem* if the opportunity would ever present itself – he can then proceed to the next stage, which is to increase his *ratzon* to live an ongoing life of *kiddush Hashem*.

May Hashem merit us that the *ratzon* of each individual *neshamah* should be to become willing to give ourselves up entirely for Hashem – that we reveal this power from within us, and that we merit to attach ourselves to the Eternal Creator.

2.6 | *Revealing The True Ratzon*

An Intense Ratzon

The aspiration of every Jew should be as it says in the possuk, “*Their hearts cried out to Hashem.*” We need to have a strong, burning *ratzon* (will) inside us so much until we get to a point in which our heart’s emotions burst forth, crying out to Hashem.

There is an external kind of crying out to Hashem, as well as an internal kind of crying out to Hashem. The *sefarim hakedoshim* call the internal kind of crying to Hashem as “a quiet scream”⁴⁰. The soul has an inner kind of crying out to Hashem which is not always verbalized, and it doesn’t have to be.

In either kind of crying out to Hashem, though, the *ratzon* of a person must always be very strong. The more a person merits to reveal his *ratzon* and gets it to become more active, the more success he will see – and the same goes for the opposite, *chas v’shalom*.

The *avodah* of revealing our *ratzon* takes a long amount of time – it is a vast *avodah*. If a person merits it, he can reach a level in which a minute or two never go by in which does doesn’t feel an internal wish that demands more closeness to Hashem, to serve Him better.

Even if a person never reaches this level, he must still try to develop a *ratzon* that is not only in his subconscious mind, but that it is more and more revealed out in the open. It shouldn’t just remain a quiet *ratzon*.

If a person can fall asleep peacefully at night, it shows that his *ratzon* to serve Hashem better isn’t active, because if it would be, it would give him no rest. Just like, *l’havdil*, a person can’t fall asleep at night when he’s in debt or when he’s very worried about something, so should a person’s *ratzon* to serve Hashem better keep him up at night. A person has to feel his *ratzon* inside demanding more and more levels of closeness to Hashem, and he needs to feel an intense *ratzon* to fulfill this yearning.

The ideal level of *ratzon* for a person to reach is that his *ratzon* is always active throughout the day. The problem is always when the *ratzon* isn’t active every second, and then all those moments of a person’s life get wasted.

If a person’s *ratzon* has become more revealed, and he feels in himself a constant demand to always serve Hashem, then generally, such a *ratzon* will get fulfilled. It will be a true, satisfying feeling of fulfillment. The less a person feels his true *ratzon*, the less he will actualize the *ratzon*.

⁴⁰ *tzaakah b’lachash*

The *avodah* of having a constant *ratzon* is an amazing kind of *avodah*. In it lays the root to all success in *Avodas Hashem*, and the stronger a person develops his *ratzon* for more *Avodas Hashem*, the more barriers that come between him and Hashem will fall away, with ease.

Retzonos For Materialism Do Nothing For You

Let us diverge a bit and examine our *retzonos* for physical gains.

The Vilna Gaon taught that if someone stole, it was decreed in Heaven that he would get the item, but he still had free choice to decide how it will get to him. This is a fundamental point: the inner layer of a matter is much deeper than how the matter seems on the outside.

By the case of stealing, we would say that the item doesn't really belong to him, but in reality, it does, because he was supposed to get it somehow. It is just that the robber misuses his power of free will to get the item by stealing it.

This applies to *ratzon* as well. Even when a person fulfills his *ratzon*, it didn't happen because of his *ratzon*. It happened because Hashem willed it to happen. No matter how much of a *ratzon* he had, that's not what made it happen. Hashem had other ways how He can get the item to the person, and it didn't depend on what the person did to get it.

In other words, the *ratzon* of a person is not what's helping him. Just like we understand that a person who wants a million dollars is being unrealistic and his *ratzon* won't happen, so can we understand the opposite: that even when a person does fulfill his *ratzon*, his *ratzon* didn't make it happen. Whatever a person gained, he would have gotten it either way, through some other means that Hashem can do.

Any *ratzon* that a person has for the physical, even when it gets actualized, didn't do anything. A person has nothing from desiring the physical – nothing except a lot of pain. Whatever is coming to a person will come to him, and whatever isn't, won't.

If a person realizes this truthful fact, he will be able to detach from all his physical *retzonos*. Nobody will try to get something that's impossible for him to get.

One of the Ten Commandments is "Do not covet." The *Ibn Ezra* asks: How is it possible to fulfill this commandment? Envy is an emotion. If I feel envious in my heart for someone else's item, how can I feel otherwise? The well-known answer, he writes, is because just like the pauper has no hope in ever marrying the princess, so can a person think that someone else's item is impossible from his reach (ethically speaking). When a person thinks like this, he is able to give up from trying to get what he's envious about.

The same is true with a *ratzon* (for the physical). If one is informed that he will never be able to fulfill a particular *ratzon*, he would stop wanting it, as an automatic result.

Two Steps: Knowing And Internalizing

This point can be understood both intellectually and emotionally. It's possible that a person knows intellectually that his *ratzon* doesn't help him, but he feels differently, and his emotions are still pushing him to be ambitious about his *retzonos*.

In *Avodas Hashem*, there is always a rule of “*And you shall know today, and you will place the matter on your heart.*” First, we need to think about a fact intellectually and let it absorb – in this case, to know that our *ratzon* doesn't really get us anywhere. Then comes the second step, “*And you shall place the matter on your heart*” – to internalize what we know in our heart; to act upon them.

We will be even clearer with what we mean. At first, a person thinks that things are up to him, and that if he wants something, he'll get it, and vice versa. Really, it doesn't work like that. First, we need to be very clear in our minds of this simple point (we are only speaking about *retzonos* for the physical, not spiritual *retzonos*, which are a whole different discussion): whether I want or don't want something, it's not up to me! Reality doesn't depend on how much I want something.

Understanding this helps a person weaken his *retzonos* for the physical. It's like when you tell a person that no matter how much he runs to catch the bus, he isn't going to make it anyway; the person will then not bother to run. When a person realizes that his *ratzon* doesn't make anything happen, and that everything is decreed in Heaven – he will stop having *retzonos*.

Let's expand upon the example of a person running to make the bus. Let's say he runs to catch the bus and he makes it. He gets onto the bus, and he's panting, out of breath. It seems to him that because he ran, that's why he made the bus. What can one do to feel that his *ratzon* didn't really accomplish it?

He can say to himself: “I know and I believe that it was Hashem who enabled that I get onto the bus. Since I know this is true, then that means Hashem wanted me to make this bus – so I would have made the bus anyway. If I wouldn't have ran, then the bus would have remained where it is and I would have made it, because Hashem wanted me to make this bus. My running didn't make it happen.”

It's hard for a person to feel this way as he's running toward the bus, but after he settles down onto the bus, he can go over the story in his head and realize that his actions didn't do anything to make it happen.

This doesn't only apply in a case of someone who runs to make the bus. The idea can be applied to any situation – that after putting in effort to do something, one should reflect afterwards and remind himself that his *ratzon* didn't do a thing. The more and more a person gets used to this reflection, the more he will remember even as he's performing that it's not up to his *ratzon*. Even as he's running toward the bus, he will be able to remember that it doesn't depend on how much he runs – if he has worked on this way of thinking several times.

Herein, however, lays a deep point. It's possible that a person knows on an intellectual level that his act of running to the bus isn't doing anything, yet even so, he will still run toward the bus. Therefore, if he wants to improve, he should say to himself as he's running: "I know that running to the bus isn't going to get me to make the bus – but I still don't feel that way yet."

In other words, we have to be honest with ourselves and work in steps to improve ourselves. At first, when we begin to improve ourselves, the *avodah* is to at least understand this on an intellectual level. As a person is running toward the bus, it's hard for him to comprehend with his mind that his running isn't really doing anything for him. He has a lot on his mind right then as he's running toward the bus, and he can't think straight. At this beginning stage, the *avodah* here is that after a person gets onto the bus and he's settled down, he can reflect afterwards and realize that his running didn't make it happen.

After a person has worked on this, he can then proceed to the next stage, which is internalization. This is that as he's actually running toward the bus, he is able to realize as well that his running isn't doing anything. It is hard at first, because a person doesn't feel that that way – he knows it, but he can't feel it.

Feel this contradiction between your mind and heart, and realize that although you know in your mind that it's not up to your actions to make the bus, you don't feel this way yet in your heart, and it must be because there is a certain lack in *emunah*.

However, don't feel bad at this. The very fact that you have become aware of this inner contradiction in yourself is already part of the purification process.

There is a well-known story that someone once came to the Chazon Ish and poured out his frustration at the fact that he's a *baal gaavah* (an arrogant person), and that he can't stop being a *baal gaavah*; what should he do about this? The Chazon Ish replied: "The fact that you're aware of your *gaavah* is already a big step."

Becoming aware of our faults is a necessary step in our growth process. It actually helps you get your feelings to get more in touch with your mind, and as you keep remembering this awareness, your heart will become more purified and it will change.

This can be applied to many situations, in which a person knows that what he's doing is really lacking *emunah*. (We are not referring to sins, but simply actions that lack *emunah*). A person

can be aware in his mind that he is supposed to be acting with *emunah*, yet his heart feels that it can't be on that level yet; this awareness is painful, but it's constructive. Keep feeling that pain more and more, and you will find with time that your heart has become opened to really feeling the *emunah* you know in your mind.

Let us repeat again that in the beginning stage of improvement in this, the person running toward the bus won't be able to get himself to stop running toward the bus just by reminding himself that it's not up to him. If someone is at the level of doing this – if his heart feels the same way as his mind – then that's wonderful, but not everyone is at this level to start out with.

Understandably, this idea does not apply to sins; “*There is no advice and no understanding that can go against Hashem.*” That is simple and clear. We are only speaking about how we can improve on our *emunah* and in our *middos*, in which the general plan is to improve slowly and in steps.

Removing The Obstacles To Our Inner Ratzon – Through The Power of Emunah

We have only given one example so far of the concept, but the point is always the same: our soul has a power called *ratzon*, and it comes in many different “garments” and forms.

The true, inner *ratzon* deep within us is clothed by the various *retzonos* of the body, just like all the other *middos* (traits) of the soul. The true *ratzon* we all have is to serve the Creator, but this *ratzon* can get used by the body for four different evil purposes: a *ratzon* to be conceited, a *ratzon* to speak evil words, a *ratzon* for lusts or a *ratzon* for laziness.⁴¹

Any ben Torah has a *ratzon* to serve Hashem, and this *ratzon* has obviously become revealed to some extent. How much it is revealed, though, depends on the level each individual person has worked upon to reveal it. This is exactly what determines the level of a person's spirituality – how much he has worked to reveal his true *ratzon* to serve Hashem.

The *avodah* of a person is to remove the barriers that are covering over the inner *ratzon*, and this will in turn reveal it. The question is: How can we do it? What is the way for us to remove those barriers holding us back?

There are several ways to do it – and one of the ways is through *emunah*. When a person becomes aware that any of his physical *retzonos* don't get him anywhere, he will get himself to stop wanting all these various *retzonos*, as we said. In the case of the person running to make the bus, he won't care if he misses the bus, because Hashem wanted him to miss the bus; if he was

⁴¹ In *sefer Shaarei Kedushah* of Rav Chaim Vital, it is brought that there are four basic elements of the soul, which result in the four primary negative traits: fire\conceit, wind\evil speech, water\desires, and earth\sadness and laziness.

supposed to make the bus, he would have made it anyway, and if he is not supposed to make the bus, he won't make it no matter how much he runs.

By getting used to thinking this way, a person slowly eliminates these *retzonos* that are ego-oriented. Eventually, a person will be able to give up from all his physical *retzonos*, and his true *ratzon* will be revealed – the desire of the soul, which is to serve Hashem.

The desire to serve Hashem lays dormant in every Jew's soul, but other desires come and hide it. As long as a person hasn't removed these barriers, his inner *ratzon* remains hidden away. By removing these barriers, the inner *ratzon* can become revealed.

There are two methods how a person can awaken his inner *ratzon*. One way is to directly awaken it, which is by awakening one's yearning to serve Hashem; this method was explained in the earlier chapters. A second way is by removing the barriers holding back the inner *ratzon* – to remove one's physical *retzonos*. These are the various personal interests that a person has, other than the *ratzon* to serve Hashem. This method doesn't work directly with the inner *ratzon*, but instead it removes the factors holding back the inner *ratzon*, which in turn will reveal it.

Removing these outer *retzonos* will at first seem very hard. This is due to the fact that a person has many, many *retzonos*. Common *retzonos* that people have are desires for honor (which is rooted in *gaavah*/conceit), desires to chatter, various lusts, etc.

The truth is that if a person tries to work on uprooting each of these *retzonos* individually, it's overwhelming. People have many *retzonos*, and to try to get rid of each one will take too long. By using this approach, a person will minimize these *retzonos* somewhat with time – but only minimally, because he's trying to work on all of them. He will chip away at some of them, but he will still remain with some *taavah*, some *gaavah*, some *kavod*, etc.

It will take a long amount of time, and the gain itself will only be minimal, because it will also only be a partial elimination of the external *retzonos*. But there is a better way to uproot the *retzonos* – there is one single power that can get rid of them all at once!

Let us illustrate what we mean with the following parable. If someone wants to remove two floors of a house, there are two ways how he can do it. One way is to take a sledgehammer and knock down each brick, one by one. But there is another way which is much simpler – he can break the pillars on the first floor supporting the second floor, so that the second floor will fall down as automatically, and he won't have to work as hard.

If we are trying to get rid of our evil, there are two options. The first way is to work on each bad *middah* separately – to work on getting rid of our *gaavah*, and our *taavah*, and our desire for *kavod*, etc. It is possible, but it will take too long, and who knows if we will get to the end of it? Or, we have a different option: we can work on our *emunah*, and this in essence will remove all

other *retzonos*. By removing the root of the problem – a lack of *emunah* – all the other parts of the problem, the *retzonos*, will fall away and disappear.

One Single Power That Can Do A Lot

We can give some more examples to think about, so that we can identify more with the concept.

Let's say a person wants to do something which he thinks will gain him a lot of honor. He knows deep down that it's wrong to be honor-seeking, and he would like to get rid of his desire to be honored. He has three possible options he can do to work on himself.

One option is to think for a long time of how bad the desire for honor is. A second option he can try is to think that if he receives honor on this world, he's losing honor in the next world. A third option is to think that maybe he won't get any honor at all from what he's doing. There are many other possibilities as well that he can think about which will get him to avoid seeking the honor.

All of these options are fine, but we can give a totally different solution which will be much more effective, and it is to make the following reflection:

“Will my actions gain me honor? I probably will get honor if I do it. But that is a superficial perspective. The truth is that Hashem has already decreed if I'm going to get honored or not. Whether I do this action or not, whatever will happen will happen anyway, regardless if I do this or not. If I was supposed to get honored, I will get honored, and if I wasn't supposed to get honored – then I won't get honored, even if I engage in this act. If Hashem decreed that I won't get honored, nothing I do will get me to have honor, and if anything, I'll end up degraded. Thus, my desire for honor is impossible to fulfill, because even I will receive honor, it's not because of anything I did.”

By thinking in this way, the desire for honor gets weakened. It doesn't disappear totally, because a person might still be hoping that Hashem decreed that he will get honored. But at least the motivations of the person will change. The more a person does certain actions to try to get something, the more his *retzonos* grow; thus the more a person stops pursuing those actions, the more his *retzonos* will fall away.

This is an example of how one single point can do so much all at once.

Another example: a person is sitting at his table and he feels a desire to nosh on something. He has the following options. Either he can quickly give in to his desire, or he can decide he will hold back from his desire and not eat the food, or he can work on this slowly in steps.

If he does the first option – to quickly give in to his impulse to eat – this is simply a lack of self-control. If he tries the second option, which is to try to fight his desire for the food, he’s entering a full-fledged battle, and it will be most difficult to fight the desire to eat it. The third option, however, is a level in between these two extremes: he can weaken the desire for the food a little, and after the desire has been weakened, he will have a much easier time controlling himself not to eat the food.

How can he do this? The food is in front of him, and he can think to himself for a little bit: “Is it up to me if I’m going to enjoy this good or not? Hashem decided how much enjoyment I will get each year, so it’s all up to Hashem if I will enjoy this food or not. It seems that it’s up to me to enjoy the food or not, because I can just take it and eat it. But that is only the superficial perspective. Really, if Hashem wants me to have it, I’ll have it, and if He doesn’t want me to have it, He’ll make sure I don’t have it, and there will be nothing I can do about it.”

In this way, a person accomplishes two things – first of all, he controls himself from eating impulsively, because he first thinks. Secondly, he realizes that even his desire for the food will not bring him the food, unless Hashem willed it – so the enjoyment of the food does not depend on any of his efforts to get it. Thinking like this more and more weakens the desire for the food.

Of course, at the beginning stage, a person only knows about this just on an intellectual level, and it will be too hard for him to actually feel this way; he will still feel that he has some part in making it happen; hopefully one day, a person will be on the level in which he feels it, but practically speaking, it’s too high of a level to be on. Yet, doing this more and more will still have some effect on the heart, and it will weaken the physical *retzonos*.

After a person sees that his physical *retzonos* have been weakened and that there is no point in pursuing all these interests, the inner *ratzon* to serve Hashem will definitely become more revealed in his life.

This Is Not For Everybody To Work On

We should emphasize that the method we have presented here is not for everybody. There is no one way of *Avodas Hashem* that can work for all people.

The common denominator between every Jew, though, is that we must all search for how to get close to the Creator and to give Him a *nachas ruach*. It is just that there are many different ways how to get to Him, and “just as faces are not equal, so are not all *de’os* (opinions) equal.” The *de’os* of each person differ one from another, and our *de’os* are called our “*middos*” by the Rambam; each of us have different *middos*, and thus we are all unique – there is no one method that speaks to every person.

Whatever we have said until now is included in this rule. This is not to say that the way presented here isn't always truthful; it is certainly truthful, but it is a method which requires a lot of reflection, patience and mental strength to live with these words.

Therefore, someone with a weaker mind amount of intellect is more emotional, because he's more in touch with his heart than with his mind, and the way here will not work for him. The way we have presented here has a lot to do with using our mental abilities; a person who has more of an emotional personality than a thinking type needs a different method than what we have said here.

The method we have said here can only be worked on by someone who has a strong, clear intellect. This is someone who is already stable in his *Avodas Hashem* - meaning, that he has weakened his childish impulses, and he has begun to think calmly and reflect into matters. If one doesn't possess such mental capabilities, then trying to work on these matters will only be detrimental, as they are beyond what he is capable of.

We are stating this to avoid any misunderstandings, so that people will not try to work on levels that are above them. Whatever we are saying here is not necessarily for all people to work on, and each person has to figure out if these words are meant for him to work on, or not.

On one hand, Chazal say "The task is not upon you to complete." Yet that very statement ends with the words, "but neither are you exempt from it." This teaches us that sometimes people run away from their obligations, excusing themselves with the argument that "it's not meant for me to work on this." It's a subtle test.

Therefore, a person should always daven to the Creator of the world and put in a special request that if he hears about an area to work on, he should receive the proper understanding to figure out if this is something he is indeed supposed to work on it.

In this way, one's *Avodas Hashem* will be successful, in whichever area of *Avodas Hashem* that one is trying to improve on.

2.7 | *Actualizing Your True Ratzon*

The Three Garments of the Soul – Action, Speech and Thought

As we have already clarified, the power of *ratzon* (will) is like the other of our soul forces: it has an outer layer and inner layer to it. The outer layer of our *ratzon* is to desire superficial things, while the inner layer of our *ratzon* is to desire to serve the Creator. Our *avodah* is to come out of superficial *retzonos* and enter into our inner *ratzon*.

In the previous chapter, we explained one of the ways to do this, and it is by realizing that what we want doesn't get us anywhere. This is when a person firmly believes that nothing is up to him, and that only Hashem is in charge; such thinking helps a person weaken his *ratzon* for physical things.

There is a very important rule in serving Hashem which we must know. A person is made up of thought, speech and action – these are three garments of the soul. If so, there are three aspects in whatever a person wants (when it is for something physical). The percentage amount of how much thought there is to action and speech differ according to the situation, but these three factors are always present.

For example, we have said that one must understand that the fact that one wants something does nothing to make it happen. This is a kind of thought. How do we bring this thought into our speech and actions as well?

We need to expand upon the thought. In order to impress this fact upon our ability of speech, we need to speak about this verbally. We already mentioned this in the beginning chapters, that we first need to reflect into something deeply with our mind, then verbalize it, and finally, to act upon it.

This is the rule in *Avodas Hashem*: our thoughts alone will not suffice, and we need to verbalize our thoughts and actualize them. The Ramban wrote that a person has to make sure that he is acting upon his inspiration.

Thoughts are a spiritual light – *ohr*. The *ohr* needs a receptacle (*kli*) to hold it and maintain it. That receptacle is our speech and our actions. If we just remain with lofty thoughts alone, they will remain afloat in the air – and the spiritual light of our thoughts will never become absorbed in us.

People want many, many things. There are two factors in our motivations: the *ratzon*, and the *middah* (behavior) which it is manifested in. A person first likes something – which is a *middah*

of *ahavah* (love). Then, he wants it (*ratzon*). The *ratzon* is covered over by the *middah*, which is its garment.

There is a well-known statement of the Kotzker Rebbe zt”l that one should not attempt to “break” his bad *middos*, because if he breaks them, he will be left with two pieces of them!

Let us reflect into the depth of this statement, and then we can understand, with the help of Hashem, how exactly we can go about negating our superficial *retzonos* – and how we can enter and **actualize** our inner *ratzon*, which is “*Retzoneinu laasos retzoncha*” – “It is our will to do Your will.”

Knowing Doesn’t Always Lead To Acting

As we explained, we must understand that just because we want something, that doesn’t make it happen.

First, we must understand that we are made up of two kinds of desires. We have in us our inner *ratzon*, which is the desire to only do Hashem’s will: “*Retzoneinu laasos retzoncha*”, “It is our desire to do Your will.” We have also outer desires, which are all the various *retzonos* we recognize in ourselves.

The second thing we must be aware of is that we have no way of actualizing our outer desires. It’s not up to us to get what we want physically; we already explained this before.

After we get used to these two facts – by thinking about it, and by verbalizing it – now we need to bring this knowledge into the realm of our actions. We need to actualize all of this information in our daily life.

Now comes the hard part! Even when a person has already reached a deep understanding of all that we have said so far, to **act** upon this is a whole different story. We all know that even if a person knows very well what the truth is, our heart can hold us back, and then we don’t do it.

For example, when a person is in the middle of losing his temper, even if he is reminded of every statement in Chazal of how bad it is to get angry, and he is explained very well that it’s pointless to get angry – he will lash out (angrily): “I **know** that, but I’m so angry!!” (In other words, his **soul** is not at peace, in spite of the fact that he “**knows**” how bad it is to get angry).

Just because a person knows about something doesn’t mean that it affects how he behaves. A person can know very well that getting angry doesn’t get you anywhere, it’s damaging to his health, and that it’s demeaning to his stature to lose his temper, etc. – yet even with all this knowledge, his soul doesn’t feel that knowledge, and thus his behavior is unaffected.

We can compare this to someone who's trapped in the middle of the ocean, and he's drowning. He sees a board floating nearby and immediately grabs it, trying to climb onto it in the hope that it will somehow save him. He knows good and well that it's only going to tip him over and that it might make things even worse, yet he grabs it anyway, desperately. Just because a person "knows" that something is detrimental doesn't mean that he will be affected by this knowledge.

The same goes for our *retzonos*. Even after knowing that our physical *retzonos* don't get us anywhere, this isn't enough to affect us. To counter this problem, we need to extend our mental knowledge into the realm of our speech and actions.

We need to thus speak out our mind's knowledge about this with our mouths. We have explained how to do this before. Now, we will explain how we can bring our knowledge into the realm of action – how we can actualize what we know.

Actually Giving Up Your Desires

The general idea of this is as follows.

Every person has some desires that are stronger than other desires, and there are various desires that all people have; everyone is different what it comes to this. We all have things that we want very much, as well as other things that we want, but not as much as those things that we want very much.

For example, one kind of person feels a strong need for honor, and he will stop at nothing to gain more honor. Another kind of person also seeks honor, but not as much as he seeks other things in his life; he'll give up some honor if that's what it takes to get what he wants. He'd rather be lazy than get some honor, so if he is told that he will have to work very hard at something in order to get honored, he won't do it. His interest to take it easy is more appealing to him than some more honor.

There are countless scenarios of this idea, but the point is always the same: Every person has things that he wants, but he's give up those things so he can get something he wants more. Our soul is made up of four elements, and different people have in them an element that dominates over the other elements, causing each person to value certain things over others.

With particular regards to our discussion: if we want to make sure that we really believe that our *retzonos* don't get us anywhere, the sensible approach for this is to do this in steps.

First, begin by giving up things you want that aren't that important to you. This is a relatively easy challenge, and it helps you fight your *retzonos* slowly and in small steps.

For example, let's say a person likes to talk a lot. If we ask him not to talk about things he likes to talk about, this will be very hard for him, and it will be too hard for him to try to hold back from talking about those things. But we can ask him to stop talking about certain topics that he's anyways not so pulled after, and this will be effective, because he won't find it so hard to refrain from talking about those things.

So if a person is trying to get rid of his *retzonos* to always talk about everything, he should begin by getting used to the fact that not everything he wants to say can he say. He should say this verbally: "I can't say everything I want to say."

Such a person, who is trying to work on this, shouldn't just take upon himself that he will only say things that he thinks about beforehand. He will almost definitely fail such a resolution. Instead, he should do the exact opposite – he should tell himself "Not everything I want to say can I say." (We are only speaking about the kinds of conversations that are not forbidden, such as talking too much.) It is just for a person to get used to holding back his natural impulse to talk, and to put a lid on his mouth sometimes.

For example, he can accept upon himself that for twice a day, he won't say what he wants to say. It is up to each person to decide for himself what things he will refrain from talking about – it should be something that he doesn't feel such a strong urge to talk about anyway.

Acting, Together With Thought

However, we must stress here a very important point. In order to act practically upon this, we must make sure that we are aware of what we are trying to accomplish here.

Many people, who are trying to work on their *middos*, have a problem: they know that they must act differently, but they haven't thought enough beforehand about why they want to change.

Before, we mentioned that we need a *kli* (receptacle) in order to contain our *ohr* (spiritual light). The *ohr* is our lofty thoughts, and our *kli* is our speech and actions. We explained how to develop a *kli* to receive that *ohr*. But many people have the *kli*, and they don't have the *ohr* – in other words, they are trying to act this out, but they haven't clarified this yet to themselves. This problem results in years of fruitless efforts from working on oneself!

We can compare this to a non-observant Jew who has gone through much suffering in his life. Although we know that suffering purifies the soul and can bring a person closer to Hashem, it doesn't always affect people, and that is why we can find people who suffered in their life yet they are still non-observant. If a person already recognizes Hashem, then suffering can purify him and draw him closer to Hashem. Otherwise, he doesn't see suffering as a vehicle to get closer to Hashem (Unless he is a rare individual). Although suffering can help a person begin to search for

meaning in his life, it doesn't bring him directly to being close to Hashem (unless he has the "*ohr*" – a recognition of Hashem).

This is a very fundamental fact: in whatever we work on, we need to be clear what the goal of it is. Therefore, **before** we begin to try to practice self-improvement, we need to first clearly recognize where we are heading towards with all of this. Then, we need to actualize that recognition – we need a *kli* to contain the *ohr* (and we must have *ohr* to go into our *kli*!)

With regards to our discussion: When a person is beginning to work on getting rid of his superficial *retzonos*, he should **not** first begin by trying to change how he acts. It takes **months** to even recognize in our minds that superficial *retzonos* are an unworthy goal – simply put!

The first step one needs is to reflect in his mind, throughout the day, again and again, about the worthlessness of these *retzonos*. After a person feels that he has internalized this fact in his soul – and he feels it simply – he can then begin to bring this knowledge into the realm of practical action.

If a person still thinks that this is a very novel concept (that all *retzonos* for physical matters are pointless), it is not either recommended for him to try to bring this knowledge into practical life. He has to first clarify this intellectually by thinking about it over and over.

No one should say: "Okay, so I thought about this for two days, and now it's clear to me." This is sign of impatience. It takes a long time until a person is able to clarify the concept we have been discussing.

In the case of the person who has decided that he won't say everything he'd like to talk about it, he has to be clear to himself, as he's holding back from talking - about the reason for this. Otherwise, he's jumping to the action part of this without having thought about this enough, and his actions will prove unsuccessful.

In other words, resolving to change is not about "What am I going to **do** to change." It is rather about, "What am I **thinking** as I carry out those changes of action?"

It is not enough to have thought about it before I change – I have to actually be thinking as I'm carrying out the action of change about the purpose of why I'm doing it. Otherwise, it's pointless, and it will not bear any results.

Our *Avodas Hashem* needs an *ohr*, and then a *kli* – it first needs clarification in our minds, and then it needs to be carried out in the practical sense, each time we attempt to change.

Awareness As We Act

Reflect about this, until you see how simple these words are.

We mentioned before how our soul has three garments: thoughts, speech and action. Our lofty thoughts are the *ohr*, and our speech and actions are the *kli* that can contain the lofty thoughts and maintain them.

Let's think about our speech. What kind of speech will be effective to maintain our thoughts? Not every kind of speech works. What a person says in middle of his sleep doesn't do anything for him. Speech needs thought in it in order to have any value. They have to be "words that come from the heart", which "enter the heart." If our speech isn't emanating from our heart, it at least has to come from a mental recognition.

Thus, when we verbalize these matters, we need to say it with some feeling, and not just say the words. The more we recognize the truth of these matters, the more our speech will affect us when we verbalize these matters.

It's understandable to us that our speech must connect with our thoughts in order for it to be effective. The same must go for our actions. Actions only help us change when we think as we are doing them, and it's not enough to have thought about it before acting.

Thus, in whatever want to work on – in our case, building our power of *ratzon* – we need to mentally reflect on how we have two layers to our *ratzon* (external and internal), and then we need to think about this as we avoid the external *retzonos*.

One example we already gave – that if a person wants to hold back from saying everything that comes to his mind, he needs to think about this *as* he's holding back from talking. It should not be some superficial lip service ("I have accepted upon myself, for twice a day, not to say everything that comes to my mind, and therefore I will hold back from saying those things..."), but rather a clearer recognition:

"I have a *ratzon* to talk, and it is an external *ratzon* of mine, for it is not my innermost *ratzon*. My true *ratzon* is only to do Hashem's *ratzon* – I do not really want to talk, because it is not Hashem's *ratzon*. I want to remove my external *retzonos*, and therefore I am letting my inner *ratzon* take over my external *ratzon*. By slowing gaining control of my external *retzonos*, I will eventually reveal my inner *ratzon* in this way."

This kind of mentality (which we only described briefly) has to become alive as we refrain from our physical *retzonos*. In this way, our *avodah* will be much more solid, and we will be clear in what we are doing.

Remembering Hashem Throughout

Before we continue, let us remind ourselves of something very important which must accompany us in whatever we do.

It's very possible that a person is doing all of this, which is wonderful – but Hashem is out of the picture, and all he's doing is talking to himself! Without Hashem in the picture, a person is missing the inner point of this all.

The innermost point of all that we have been describing is to **work together with Hashem!** We must keep repeating this point, because it is the most truthful point from anything we have said here.

In other words, we need to talk to Hashem about everything we have learned here. Talk to Hashem about any minute detail here – one can say the following:

“*Ribono shel olam*, You gave me an inner *ratzon* to do Your *ratzon*. You also gave me external desires which seek to do the opposite of Your *ratzon*. I know that my external desires are getting in the way of my inner *ratzon*. I am trying to hold back from those desires and instead reveal my inner *ratzon* to serve You. Please, help me succeed!”

Without doing this, a person ignores the most basic point. It's possible that a person, all his life, is involved in a life of *Avodas Hashem*, and he does wonderful things – yet he's just “serving” Hashem, and Hashem isn't even on his agenda at all, *rachmana litzlan* (May G-d have mercy upon him!)

This might sound very strange, but it's true, and it's one of the biggest mistakes people make when they seek to improve in their service toward the Creator: it is possible that a person is **servicing** the Creator his whole life, yet he has no **connection** with the Creator...he might be a “servant” of Hashem, but he lacks an actual bond with Him.

First Develop Your Individual Strengths, Then Unify Them All Together

To summarize our *avodah*: First, we need to think about these matters, and then we need to talk about it with Hashem (and still think into it as we *daven* to Him).

After some time, we can begin to actually change our actions; but we still have to think as we do those actions of change. Our whole psyche must be involved in what we do – action, speech, and thought. As we said, this is a step-by-step process, and we cannot improve our actions, speech and thoughts at once. We first need to change our thoughts, then our speech, and then our actions. We must go in these steps, or else we will not succeed.

This is actually the general introduction to our entire inner world. What do we mean?

The abilities in our soul⁴² each stand on their own, but they are all part of one unit. Our *avodah* is to build our soul – first by building each faculty in our soul separately, and then, to combine them together. Without combining our soul abilities together, we remain with a bunch of scattered parts of our soul.

There is also an opposite problem, in which a person only seeks to combine the parts of his soul together, but he never developed his individual strengths to begin with. He will lack a properly developed soul if he works like this.

We want our soul abilities to come together as a proper mixture, not as a mess thrown together. We can compare this to mixing different foods together – one way is a random mix which will lead to a horribly tasting food, while another kind of mix is planned out with an order, resulting in a delicacy.

So first, we have to recognize what each ability in our soul is, one by one. As you learn about each ability, focus just on that ability, and don't try to see how it connects to another ability in the soul; then you'll just be mixing it up too much, because it will just confuse things.

We can give a simple example that explains this. Two of our *middos* are *atzlus* (laziness) and *kavod* (honor-seeking). Laziness comes from our element of earth, and honor comes from our element of fire. First, a person needs to know what laziness is and what honor is. Then, he should see how they can oppose each other, and then he needs to see how they can work together. But they must be seen as two separate abilities.

As an example, many people want to begin improving themselves immediately by trying to avoid honor. (Anyone with an able thinking mind realizes that seeking honor is a bad thing, and if someone doesn't feel that way, his feelings are deadened.) But it's a mistake to begin by trying to avoid honor. First, one has to know what the concept of honor is! After knowing what something is, only then can we either build upon it or break it down.

A person should think: "Do I want honor or not? If I do want honor – what kind of honor am I seeking? What does it give me, and what do I feel from getting honor? What are the things that give me honor?"

A person is apt to think that he doesn't need to think about this, because he already understands that honor-seeking is a negative trait. But if that is his attitude, then he doesn't even understand what the concept of honor is.

There are actually three reasons why a person should know what honor is: (1) In order to honor others, we need to know what honor is. (2) In order to break the desire for honor, we need to

⁴² There are thirteen basic faculties of the soul, and this is explained in *Getting To Know Your Soul* of the author. *Ratzon* is the fourth highest faculty of the soul.

know how to fight it, so if we don't know what honor is, we won't know how to fight it. (3) The *neshamah* (soul) is called *kavod*/honor.

We have only given one example of the idea, but the inner point is always one and the same: we have to recognize what every *middah* is. It is simple that we have to know what the good *middos* are, but even bad *middos* we need to recognize.

This is always the rule, and it doesn't change – whether we are trying to develop a positive ability in our soul, or whether we are trying to break a negative ability in our soul. The *avodah* is always one and the same: we must know the structure of each ability.

The same goes for the *middah* of *ratzon*: we need to build our *ratzon* as a proper structure. First, we must develop our inner *ratzon*, mentally, by thinking and reflecting about it. Then, we need to verbalize it, and then we need to actualize it in our life. But we have to go in that order, and we cannot work on all three areas at once.

May Hashem help us serve Him in a stable way, enabling us to receive the Heavenly assistance to change how we act - and may we merit to always be close to Him throughout our life, as a result.

2.8 | *Nullifying Evil Desires*

“Ohr Yoshor” and then “Ohr Choizer” – From Thought to Action

We will continue what we began discussing in the last chapter, that there are three garments of our soul – thoughts, speech and actions.

A fundamental rule is that in everything, there is an “*ohr yoshor*” (“straight light”) and an “*ohr choizer*” (“returning light”). We will explain these concepts.

Ohr Yoshor is that for every action a person does, there is a source of the action – something that is the driving force behind the act. It can be that we spurred on the action either through speech, or through thinking, or through simply acting. Whatever the motivating force is, it remains present through the act from the beginning of the act until the end. Sometimes that motivating force weakens, and sometimes it gets strengthened; but if it would cease, then the act would lose its power to function totally.

Ohr Choizer is that as someone does an act, the motivating force behind the act continues to strengthen. This concept is really mentioned in both *Sefer HaChinuch* and *Mesillas Yesharim*: “The heart is pulled after the actions.” When we do something, it inspires us as well on our inside. It is essentially the concept of *ohr choizer*.

This shows us that if not for our inner will to do what’s right, we wouldn’t perform. At the same time, the actions we do also awaken our inner will – affecting our thoughts, speech and actions. We know this is true, because when a person doesn’t want something, he doesn’t think about it, nor does he speak about it or practice it. It is only when we want something that our thoughts, speech and actions can spur on our desire for it even more.

The more a person’s *ratzon* has in it *ohr yoshor* – in other words, the more he wants to do something – the more his *ohr choizer* is increased, and then his very actions will then strengthen his *ratzon* for it even more.

It is not enough to develop our *ratzon* before we act, speak and think. Our *ratzon* has to keep strengthening as we act, speak and think – or else it will weaken.

If a person had a *ratzon*, but when it came to acting up on it, his *ratzon* has weakened – it’s a sign that his *ratzon* needs to still become more revealed. If we don’t seek to keep our *ratzon* going as we act, speak and think of it, then whatever inspiration we do receive from it will only be temporary.

“The heart is pulled after the actions.”⁴³ This is a well-known concept, yet we can all see that there are many actions which people do that do not cause one’s heart to be stirred. What is missing from the actions we are doing? Why aren’t our actions fueling on our *ratzon* more?

It’s not because we are missing *ratzon* in our actions. This cannot be, because every action we do involved some *ratzon*, even actions that are performed mechanically. Our true *ratzon* is there, but it is just that the habitual tendency to be “*melumadah*” (acting by rote) has taken over.

Sometimes the “*melumadah*” aspect becomes so strong that a person views the main thing to be getting the action done, and having a pure *ratzon* involved has become a miniscule priority by the person. But no matter how little a person is involved with increasing his *ratzon* through the act, there is always some *ratzon* involved in the act, some *ratzon* to want to do what is right.

When a person has a *ratzon* to improve on something, but this isn’t affecting how he acts so much – his actions will not do much for him, and it is because the *ratzon* hasn’t become revealed yet.

Thus, there always two parts to *ratzon*. One part of *ratzon* is that we need *ratzon* in order to spur us on to act, speak, and think about *ratzon*. Another part of *ratzon* is that as we act, speak and think, our *ratzon* should become more revealed, and if it isn’t, our actions in turn will not be able to fuel our *ratzon*.

Remove the Negative Aspects and then Develop the Positive Aspects

In every part of *Avodas Hashem*, there are always two steps: “*Remove yourself from evil*”, and “*do good*.” In other words, we need to remove the negative aspects that are holding us back, as well as build the positive actions that improve us.

In *ratzon*, there are two parts as well to what we need to accomplish – first we need to remove the negative *retzonos*, and then we can reveal our true *ratzon*.

The word “*ratzon*” has the same letters as the word “*tzinor*,” pipe, as well as the word *notzar* – to guard. This hints to the two abilities which our *ratzon* can accomplish. On one hand, our *ratzon* can act as a “pipe” and transfer over to us our soul’s natural yearning for the Creator, just like a pipe serves to transfer water. That is the “do good” aspect of *ratzon*. The other aspect of *ratzon* is “to guard” – it can “guard” our inner yearning, protecting it from negativity. This is the other aspect in *ratzon*, that it can “*remove yourself from evil*”.

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This is what we mean: our *ratzon* is made up of two layers. Our *ratzon* has in it the true *ratzon*, which is the will to do the Creator's will, and it is also made up of our various other interests – the “yeast in the sourdough”, a reference to the evil inclination.

The other interests we have, other than our true *ratzon*, covers over our true *ratzon*. To eliminate those negative *retzonos*, we need to use the “*notzar*” aspect of *ratzon*, which is guard our true *ratzon* and return it to its source. We must also utilize the holy desire of our soul, our true *ratzon* itself, by using the “*tzinor*” aspect of *ratzon* – let us explain this.

What is essentially the idea of a *tzinor*? A *tzinor*/pipe transfers something from one end to another. It is not just a hole on one side and a hole on another side – it serves to escort what you are transferring. That is *ratzon* – our *ratzon* connects to our actions, speech and thoughts. This is the “do good” stage.

As for the “remove yourself from evil” part, we use our *ratzon* to return our various worldly interests to their source, the true *ratzon*. In other words, the way we remove our various worldly desires, our other *retzonos*, is by getting them all to become one single *ratzon*.

Control the Evil Desire – Don't Try To Eliminate It

We will explain how all of this is really close to our souls to work on – simply put.

We mentioned before that the soul has three garments over it: thought, speech and action. *Chas v'shalom*, a person might misuse these garments and have forbidden thoughts, forbidden speech and do forbidden actions. What is our *avodah* when we get a desire for an evil thought, an evil conversation, or to commit an evil act?

In any *avodah*, first we have to avoid the negative, and then we can build the positive. If we are trying to negate our evil desires, we first have to avoid evil before we attempt the second stage, which is to “do good.” First comes “*remove yourself from evil*” – then comes “do good”. Let us explain.

How do we remove our evil desires? Simply, it would seem that we have to stop desiring those things. After all, the possuk says “*remove yourself from evil*”.

But there is more to it. Although the goal is to remove the evil *retzonos*, there is no way to actually do this. We cannot succeed if we attack our evil *ratzon* head-on. What we can do, however, is to stop the evil *retzonos* from spreading out into our soul garments of thought, speech and action. When our evil *retzonos* are contained from spreading out into the rest of our soul, it goes back to its source – the true *ratzon*. It then becomes a catalyst to help one improve.

For example, let's say a person has an evil *ratzon* to be haughty, or he has desires to indulge in food. Even if he screams all day from morning till night, "I wish I would never have such evil desires!" it won't work.

How do we get rid of evil desires? It cannot be done by simply deciding that we won't desire those things. That's not the way to go about it. What we need to do is, as we explained before – to use the "notzar" aspect of *ratzon*, which is to make sure that the evil desires aren't spreading.

If we get a thought of arrogance in our heads, for example - instead of continuing to think about this, we just need to stop thinking those thoughts, so that the evil *ratzon* won't continue spreading into our thoughts even more.

Let's say a person has an urge to gossip or to say something improper. What he should do is stop talking, which will stop the evil *ratzon* from spreading further into how he talks. And if a person is faced with a temptation to commit a sin, *chas v'shalom* – or any action that's beneath him to do – the *avodah* is to disengage from the action, so that the evil *ratzon* doesn't continue to contaminate how one is acting.

In other words, our *avodah* is not to try to erase our evil *ratzon* and battle it. Let the evil *ratzon* be as it is! Our *avodah* is to make sure it doesn't spread further. Let your evil *ratzon* remain - and just disengage from the evil thought/conversation/action you're tempted with.

That is all the first part of our *avodah* – to "remove yourself from evil". The second part of our *avodah*, "do good", is to actually utilize our true, holy *ratzon*. How can we awaken it? There are two ways.

One way, which is a very high level and not so feasible for us to do, is to always live with our true *ratzon* on a constant basis. This is a very lofty level to reach, and most people do not attain this.

There is another way, however, which all can practice and gain from. It is to use the "tzinor" aspect of *ratzon*: when you want to awaken your true *ratzon*, connect your thoughts/speech/actions with your *ratzon*. When you perform any action, do it with *ratzon*; when you speak about something you want to attain, speak about it with *ratzon*; and when you think about something you want to attain, combine your *ratzon* with your thoughts.

To summarize again, the first part of our *avodah* is "remove yourself from evil", which is to prevent our evil *retzonos* from taking over. The second part in our *avodah* is "do good", which is (at least in the initial stage of this) to allow our true *ratzon* to channel over into how we think, speak and act. Our true *ratzon* needs to become apparent in how we are thinking, speaking and acting.

This is the general method in how we work with our *ratzon*.

Clarifying What You Want

Let us now be more specific.

When we start with the first stage – nullifying our evil *retzonos* – one must first figure out: What exactly **are** my *retzonos*? What are the things I want?

Without figuring out what we want in the first place, we won't have any interest to want to work on our *retzonos*, and our *avodah* here will just be cloudy and confusing.

So it is clear that at first we must make a list of our *retzonos*: our holy *retzonos*, as well as our evil *retzonos*. Figure out which of your desires are for a holy purpose, and which are not. If we avoid thinking about this, then we are basically running away from reality, and then our *avodah* here will not work.

After you figure out what your *retzonos* are (and make sure that you have begun with the first stage, which is “*remove yourself from evil*” – figure out what your evil desires are), you can now attempt to figure out which *retzonos* you have that are stronger than others.

We will then arrive at either one of two possibilities:

One option we now have is to begin by weakening our less powerful *retzonos* that are evil, and only after that to work on nullifying the more difficult desires in us that are harder to overcome. If we take this option, then our *avodah* here is essentially that we are making sure that our evil *retzonos* aren't taking over and spreading too far. This is the easier approach to take.

Or, we can start with our most difficult evil desire that's hard to conquer, and after that it will be much easier to get rid of our various other evil *retzonos*. This is obviously a harder *avodah*.

We can compare this to a water leak in which water is gushing out of its source, and we want to prevent it from flooding more. If we stuff the source of where the water's gushing out of, then we stop all the flooding, but it's difficult to stop the flood at its source. But if we put towels and other obstacles at ten feet away from the gushing of the water, then it's easier to stop the flood, because we aren't directly trying to fight the source of the flood – we are just preventing it from flooding any more. The further away we are from the source of the flood, the easier it is to stop the flooding.

The lesson we see from this is that it will be very difficult if we start by attacking our hardest desires to overcome. Doing this is waging war with the source of all the evil in the soul, and it's unrealistic that the person will win. It is thus a more feasible approach if we first fight our weaker desires.

Let us emphasize that this depends on each individual. If one has a strong desire for something holy, then it is indeed possible for him to begin by fighting his root evil desire. But if his holy

desires are weak, he should not attempt to fight his root evil desire, and instead he should gain control of his desires in the way we have said.

Therefore, there is no way to answer the issue of, “Which *ratzon* do I start to work on uprooting the most?” Every person has to figure out what all his *retzonos* are, and then differentiate between which *retzonos* are holy and which aren’t. He should then see how strong his holy *retzonos* are.

The stronger a holy *ratzon* is, the harder it is to fight an evil *ratzon* that opposes it, because for every amount of good in a person that Hashem created, Hashem also created an equally powerful amount of evil in the person that can challenge the good.

After clarifying which *retzonos* one has to fight, one should use the method given above: exercise self-control over the evil *ratzon* that it shouldn’t get out of hand. Realize that you have the evil desire, but let it be; your *avodah* here is to make sure it doesn’t spread further than what it is now.

Working On This Slowly And Sensibly

What do we mean when we say that one has to make sure that his evil *ratzon* shouldn’t spread? It cannot be done so fast. It is a slow process.

For example, if a person is working to eliminate his *gaavah*/haughtiness, he should not decide that from now on, he will no longer have any *gaavah*. Instead, he should do as follows: If in the past he has been doing certain actions that stems from his *gaavah*, he should stop doing those actions.

For this, he can accept upon himself that for five times a day, he will not do those actions he was used to doing which spurred on his *gaavah*. He should keep doing this until he totally stops doing those actions which he did out of his *gaavah*.

The goal of this, however, is not just to get rid of the haughty actions; the inner goal here is to try to uproot the will to be haughty in the first place (by avoiding the actions that spur it on). When a person only focuses on abstaining from haughty actions – but he’s not trying to get rid of his *gaavah* – then he is acting like the “fake humble ones” described in *sefer Mesillas Yesharim*, who merely act humble on the outside, but deep down, are full of *gaavah*.

We want to uproot the very *ratzon* for having *gaavah*. But we cannot do this by simply trying to uproot the *ratzon*. In order to do it, we have to stop doing the actions which spur on the *gaavah*, with the underlying intention that we are trying to uproot the *ratzon* for *gaavah*, in the process.

So although we are trying to get rid of the very *ratzon* for *gaavah*, we cannot do this by attacking the evil *ratzon* head-on. We need to work with the garments of the evil *ratzon* (which are the

actions, words or thoughts that are spurring on the *ratzon*), not the actual evil *ratzon*. As we do those actions, our motivation should be not just to improve our actions, but to get rid of the evil *ratzon* behind it.

In this example we gave – working to uproot the *ratzon* for *gaavah* - the person should not think that he's trying to stop doing actions of *gaavah*, but that he's trying to stop his *ratzon* for *gaavah* from getting out of hand. This has to be the mentality as he refrains from *gaavah*-oriented actions: “My *ratzon* for *gaavah* is making me act a certain way, and by refraining from those actions, I am preventing my *ratzon* for *gaavah* from getting out of hand.”

Going Upwards

Usually, when a person is involved in self-improvement, he has to begin with improving first his actions, before he begins to work on improving the speech and the thoughts. This is because speech and thoughts are higher abilities than our actions, and generally the *avodah* of a person is to work his way upwards (“*m'lisata l'leila*” – to “go from below to above”).

For example, we gave the example of a person who wants to get rid of his *gaavah*. A person's *gaavah* manifests itself in all three layers of the soul – in the actions, in the speech, and in the thoughts. A person thinks about *gaavah*, so he has *gaavah* in his thoughts. A person also talks in a manner of *gaavah* – even though he doesn't realize it. A person acts with *gaavah* – his whole expression is giving off the impression of *gaavah*.

Which area should he work on first – action, speech or thought?

The sensible approach is to start from the outermost soul layer, which are the actions, and eventually get to the innermost soul layer, which are the thoughts. You can't go straight to working on the root – you have to begin further from the root, and then eventually make your way towards the root as you progress. So one needs to start working on the actions he does out of *gaavah*, and then he should progress to working on the words he speaks out of *gaavah*. After that, he can work to get rid of his thoughts of *gaavah*. But he must go in this order, working his way from the bottom up.

If someone understands his soul a bit, he knows quite well that it's a harder to fight for control over one's thoughts than to control how one talks, and it's harder to control how one talks than to control how to act.

Why? It is because the battle here is not about what to “think” and what not to think, what to “say” and what not to say, and what to “do” and what not to do. It is about gaining control of the evil *ratzon* behind all of this, to stop it from spreading out any further.

If the evil *ratzon* has spread all the way until it is affecting one's actions, then to work on uprooting the evil thoughts is not sensible, because it has spread much further than that. It has spread all the way to how one acts. You can't attack the problem closer to its root – it's much more difficult to deal with. That's why one needs to first work on improving the actions, and only after to progress his way towards working on improving his speech and then his thoughts.

There are some rare individuals who can work first on attacking the problem at its root, but this is not the simple approach, and thus it will work for most people. Most people do not have such a powerful, holy *ratzon* to be able to attack their evil thoughts with.

Sometimes, there are situations in which a person is able to uproot even his evil thoughts right away. This only happens rarely, and it is not a daily feat. As proof to this, people have a hard time concentrating during *Shemoneh Esrei*, and their thoughts are everywhere at once; people try to fight these thoughts, only to be unsuccessful. There is almost no one who can control his thoughts so well.

Therefore, it is not recommended to begin with uprooting evil thoughts. We must begin with improving the actions, and then progress to improving how we speak, and after that to improving on how we think. All of this has to be done as a step-by-step process, with the intention that we are trying to get rid of the evil *ratzon* behind them – as we mentioned before.

First Uproot The Incorrect Way of Thinking

We will now mention another very important point.

We have said that it is not recommended to begin with working on thoughts. There are two factors to this: the way of thinking that a person has, and the various fleeting thoughts that goes through a person's mind. They can each present a different problem.

What we have been discussing so far are random, passing evil thoughts. But there is another kind of problem we haven't discussed, and it is a much deeper problem. This is when one has a certain evil way of thinking which he usually sticks to – when he has formed for himself certain thinking patterns and beliefs that are erroneous.

In the case of *gaavah* we discussed until now, we mentioned someone who has passing thoughts of *gaavah*. But there is another kind of *baal gaavah*, and that is someone who thinks that there's nothing wrong with being a *baal gaavah* in the first place! Such a person thinks: "It's healthy for my confidence to be a *baal gaavah*! I am truly special..."

If that is his *hashkafah* (way of thought), then his very thinking patterns are wrong, and this needs to be corrected – before he begins to try getting rid of *gaavah*-oriented thoughts.

The previous kind of problem we discussed before this was a simpler problem to deal with. This is a person who knows in his mind that *gaavah* is a bad *middah*, and he knows all the sources in *sefarim* that say that *gaavah* is bad; but he still struggles with it, and he tries to work on uprooting his *gaavah*-oriented thoughts. This kind of a person, as we said, needs to begin by working first on improving his *gaavah*-oriented actions, and only after that to work on his *gaavah* thoughts.

But this method cannot help someone who has set in his mind that there's nothing wrong with *gaavah*. His very way of thinking is misguided, and his problem is deeper.

If such a person wants to work on himself, before he begins to improve his actions, he needs to get rid of his erroneous mindset. His very way of thought, his "*tavnis hamachshavah*", must be improved first. After he realizes that his way of thinking was wrong, he can then begin to improve his actions, speech, and thoughts.

If a person wants to get rid of his *gaavah*, he cannot begin to improve himself at all if he still thinks in the back of his mind that there's nothing wrong with being a *baal gaavah*. He should not even attempt to improve his actions, because it won't help. He has to get rid of his very way of thinking and realize that he's mistaken.

Different Souls Need Different Methods

To finish up, we must emphasize an important point. There is a very good chance that everything that was said in this *sefer* isn't feasible for some people to try to implement. This is due to the fact that the matters here aren't meant for every soul to practice.

Generally speaking, there are three kinds of people. There are souls who are more action-rooted. There are souls that are more emotional and focus less on action, and then there is a third group of souls which are more the thinking, analytical type. (There are other souls who are none of the above, but they are extremely rare.)

If someone has a soul that is more rooted in action than in emotion or thought, he will have a hard time coming to terms with what has been said in this *sefer*, because since he identifies with the action more than with what's behind an action, he's not so motivated to understand the inner depth behind an action, and he doesn't see this as a necessity.

What we have been discussing in this *sefer* is how to uproot the evil motivations that are behind an act, and this is all about uncovering the inner depth behind our actions. It was mainly about uprooting the *ratzon* behind the action – that by improving our actions, we are able to come to weaken the evil motivations behind them. This is a difficult point to understand for someone who is more action-oriented, because he sees everything in terms of how to act, not in what's behind the act.

Therefore, this *sefer* is only for a more internal kind of person, who sees beyond action. If an action-oriented person tries to implement the words of this *sefer*, he will not really feel the need to work on these matters, and even if he thinks about them, it will be just be only superficially.

Not only that, but the truth is that this *sefer* has presented many different ways on how to work on our *ratzon*, and there is no one way that is for everybody. Each person will have to figure out if the words here in this *sefer* are meant for him to work on.

This is not only true when it comes to working on our *ratzon*, but it applies to working on any area of *Avodas Hashem*. There are always many possible approaches on how to improve. The inner point of all of them, however, always remains the same; it is just that there are many approaches to get to that inner point.

Therefore, if there are words here which do not speak to the heart of the reader, it doesn't mean anything is wrong with you, and it doesn't mean that you're not motivated to improve. It is simply that the paths delineated in this *sefer* are not any of the paths that are meant for you to take. If your soul feels that these words do not speak to you, often this can indeed be the case.

May Hashem help all of us merit to do his Will, throughout all our life.